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# The art of apocalyptic persuasion : the rhetorical dynamics and history of influence of the letter to Laodicea (Rev 3:14-22).

Surridge, Robert James

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# THE ART OF APOCALYPTIC PERSUASION

## The Rhetorical Dynamics and History of Influence of the Letter to Laodicea (Rev 3:14-22)

by

Robert James Surridge

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**Doctor of Philosophy**

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# Abstract

Much of scripture is rhetoric, literature that the author hopes will effect a specific change. In certain passages the author seeks to persuade the reader to have a change of heart, to repent. Such passages illuminate the relationship between text, reader and authorial intent. Their reception by, and influence on, readers can help explain why scripture retains its mystery, power and status within interpretive communities.

This thesis assesses the rhetorical dynamics of the call to repentance in the Laodicean pericope of Rev 3:14-22.

This study shows the debt the Laodicean call owes to previous biblical repentance calls and examines the repentance theme in Revelation, including a motif strategy in which repentance symbols from the letters recur as rhetorical reinforcers. The behavioural changes sought by the author are also examined. Archaeological and text-critical approaches have tended to obscure the rhetorical power and theological focus of all seven letters (Rev 2:1-3:22) and this is seen to have been recovered in more recent literary approaches.

This passage has a fascinating history of influence (*Wirkungsgeschichte*). It seeks to persuade and has done so to great effect, as demonstrated by two communities which believed themselves to be prophetically identified by it. These are Thomas Brightman and his school in seventeenth-century England and the early Seventh-day Adventist

church in nineteenth-century America. The Laodicean letter's influence on them demonstrates that it is a link in a long chain of influences in religious thought.

The Laodicean call to repent achieves its rhetorical power via a 'carrot and stick' dynamic, with threats and promises acting as a self-renewing motivator. Its effect on audiences is considerable because readers readily recognise themselves in the descriptions of spiritual conceit and lukewarmness.

The influence of Rev 3:14-22 demonstrates the rhetorical genius of the text and the dynamic nature of certain text-reader relationships.

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# Dedication

For

Dawn,

Martin

and

Jack

# Acknowledgements

I would like the thank the following people and institutions and acknowledge their rôle in the completion of this thesis.

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# Preface

English language biblical quotations have been taken from the New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise stated. The regular exception being quotations of Rev 3:14-22 where I have used my own translation. (This is found in full in Appendix B, below.) Greek language biblical quotations are from the Nestle-Aland Novum Testamentum Graece, XXVII Edition. All quotations from primary and secondary sources retain the original spelling, abbreviations, citation format, capitalisation, emphases and punctuation. Foreign language quotations appear italicised except for the titles of works referred to. For my own emphasis I have used underlining.

# Chapter One

## Introduction to the Themes and Concerns of the Thesis

### A. The effect of Texts - *Wirkungsgeschichte*

This is a thesis about the far-reaching influence of a prophetic utterance. That prophetic utterance is the Laodicean 'letter'[1] of Rev 3:14-22, in particular the repentance call that is at its core. The questions that will be asked of this text include, what aspects of intertextuality does it have with the rest of Revelation? In what ways did the author seek to ensure that it was effectively persuasive to his audience? What influences on the author gave rise to the form and content of this passage? What influences and effects has this text subsequently had during its history of interpretation, particularly amongst those who identified with it in a dynamic fashion? And, how have certain methodological approaches to the text obscured or revealed its persuasive dynamics?

No text, sacred or otherwise, stands in isolation. It is first born of an author's desire to communicate meaning and it is shaped primarily by the author-audience

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[1]Some authors refer to the seven pericopes of Revelation 2 and 3 as 'letters', others refer to them only as 'messages.' They are not personal epistles and they are highly formulaic but as Kirby points out "(t)he comparison with a letter – especially one designed to be read aloud to an audience is quite close". J T Kirby, "The Rhetorical Situation of Revelation 1-3", New Testament Studies 34 (1988), p. 201. Schüssler Fiorenza on the other hand states firmly that "(t)he so called 'seven letters' are not real letters. Rather they function as messages that all follow the same rhetorical pattern." E Schüssler Fiorenza, Revelation: Vision of a Just World (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), p. 53. This thesis uses both terms interchangeably as many other works do, but is in general agreement with Schüssler Fiorenza's position.

dynamic. But other factors can be very influential. These can come from the pre-supposition pool common to author and audience, the *Sitz im Leben*, and the cultural, religious and literary background of the author. Once uttered, that text goes on to exert influences and effects for at least as long as it is considered to be in some way inspired or canonical, especially when it is empowered with the attributes associated with sacred texts.[2] By exploring the influences working on a text, as well as the influence that it has exerted, it becomes evident that, like many sacred texts, it is a link in a long chain of influences in sacred thought and religious experience - part of an observable stream of consciousness.

## 1. Still A Neglected Field?

Over the last two decades some attempt to develop the history of biblical textual influence into an academic discipline has been made, and a small but increasing amount of research has been undertaken in this cross-disciplinary field. This area of academic research is sometimes known by the German term *Wirkungsgeschichte*. (This term will be discussed in more detail below.) However, there is still an understandable reluctance to venture too far into this area of research, to go beyond what a text may have meant at the time of the original text/author interface. It is still generally believed that the meaning that a text had at the time of its origin supersedes all other subsequent meanings by a large factor.[3] Indeed "it is often held that the theological significance of a

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[2]B Childs, The New Testament as Canon (London: SCM Press, 1984), pp. 514-517, and Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture (London: SCM Press, 1979), pp. 74-83.

[3]F Watson, Text, Church and World: Biblical Interpretation in Theological Perspective (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), discusses this stubborn problem in biblical studies, pp. 3-14.

text may be derived from its literal, historical meaning without any need for an additional disciplinary framework."[4]

It is perhaps not too surprising that few wish to study the effects a text has had on human history, society, art, philosophy and belief. For one thing cross-disciplinary skills and knowledge are needed, and for another the volume of the potential subject matter is almost overwhelming. Choices have to be made and limitations set, as indeed is evident from the work that has been done in this area thus far.

This current thesis is a modest foray into this realm. It has also had to be limited, and justification for those limitations and choices will be given below.

Nevertheless the need for more work in this genre of research is recognised. The appeals for this kind of work to be undertaken continue to go out, and in small numbers those calls are being met by some fascinating works of scholarship. One such call was made by as significant a figure in biblical studies as Heikki Räisänen in his noted article "The Effective 'History' of the Bible: A Challenge to Biblical Scholarship?"[5] Under the initial heading "A Neglected Field" Räisänen relates that a very early proponent of the study of the historical effect of biblical texts was a student of Harnack, Ernst von Dobschütz.[6] Sadly his work was not followed up by other scholars and the field was still a neglected one, in Räisänen's opinion, as recently as 1992. In fact, "It has been all but ignored by the exegetical guild."[7]

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[4]Ibid., p. 13.

[5]H Räisänen. "The Effective 'History' of the Bible: A Challenge to Biblical Scholarship?". Scottish Journal of Theology 45 (1992): 303-324.

[6]Ibid., p. 303.

[7]Ibid.

## 2. Work Achieved and Proposed on Biblical Influence

A number of articles, books, theses and other research endeavours have been written relatively recently, covering different areas of biblical material. Some of the most significant, as Räisänen acknowledges,[8] is the body of work that Ulrich Luz has produced on Matthew's Gospel. Luz's first major piece of research in this area was a commentary[9] which follows the standard commentary format with the addition of a *Wirkungsgeschichte* section for each Matthean pericope. This volume demonstrates one of the challenges of this approach – bulk of material. Luz's first weighty volume only covered the first seven chapters of Matthew.[10] Luz has further focused his study of the history of interpretation and influence in Matthew in History.[11]

A few other works in New Testament research have also been produced.[12] An example, on a smaller scale, but a very recent piece of research, and one with some relevance to this thesis, was a paper given at the 1998 SBL/AAR annual conference. In "Waco Apocalypse: the Book of Revelation in the Branch Davidian Tradition" Kenneth Newport sought to demonstrate how the effects of the interpretation of Rev 13:11 by the follows of David Koresh fatally contributed to the Waco tragedy.[13]

An example from Old Testament scholarship is John Sawyer's The Fifth Gospel[14] which is an examination of the usage of Isaiah within Christianity focusing

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[8]Ibid., pp. 310-313.

[9]U Luz, Matthew 1-7 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1989).

[10]The full German work runs to three large volumes, U Luz, Das Evangelium nach Matthäus, Vol. I-III, Evangelisch-katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament (Zurich: Benziger Verlag, 1989-1997).

[11]U Luz, Matthew in History: Interpretation, Influence and Effect (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994).

[12]Räisänen, gives some examples of work done in the 1980s, pp. 305-307 and 310-312.

[13]On the interpretation of Revelation 2-3 by Koresh and his followers see below, p. 317.

[14]J F A Sawyer, The Fifth Gospel: Isaiah in the History of Christianity (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

particularly on its influence on Christology. Sawyer acknowledges that this is only a partial study of the subject of Isaiah's influence and that additional volumes would be needed to trace its *Wirkungsgeschichte* in Judaism and Islam.[15] Although Sawyer includes examples of Christian art and music inspired by Isaiah his focus is probably closer to a history of interpretation than Räisänen's concept of 'effective history'.

Church historians have also begun to look at the Bible's influence on social and political history as well as its more obvious relationship with ecclesiastical history. Again the volumes of material generated by such research are daunting. The highly respected historian of the seventeenth century, Christopher Hill, includes a chapter entitled "Some Biblical Influences"[16] in his work on the English Bible in the seventeenth century but readily admits that "there is far more to be said about the Bible's influence then than I can manage to say in a single chapter."[17] What is more Hill restricts his investigation mostly to the literary influence of Scripture.

The influence of the Bible on specific political and sociological phenomena can also be included in this discipline. One such work is Prior's The Bible and Colonialism,[18] which looks in particular at the influence of the Abraham and Exodus narratives on Third World European colonialism, as well as on Zionism.[19] Prior mainly looks at the misuse of the Bible by colonialists for the justification of oppression and expansionism,

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[15]Ibid., pp. 5f.

[16]C Hill, The English Bible and the Seventeenth Century Revolution (London: Allen Lane, 1993), pp. 335-369.

[17]Ibid., p. 335.

[18]M Prior, The Bible and Colonialism, The Biblical Seminar, 48 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997).

[19]Ibid., pp. 48ff, and pp. 106f respectively.

but the influence that the text itself has had is explored to a lesser extent as well.[20] Prior also recognises the necessity of limitations to studies of biblical influence, even citing Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle as a mitigating factor.[21]

Projects on a larger scale have also focused on *Wirkungsgeschichte.* One of the stated aims of the *Evangelisch-katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament* series, in which Luz's commentary on Matthew originally appeared, is to include the effective history of texts with the more traditional material normally found in a commentary series. However, Räisänen believes that Luz's work is the only one in the series that really tackles the issue.[22] The cross-disciplinary King's College project that produced the Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation[23] in 1990 helped make the history of interpretation, and thus to some extent the history of influence, more accessible to the student. It acknowledges that interpretation involves "a 'conversation' between text and reader, and perhaps where a tradition is involved, a multiplicity of conversations stretching back maybe for centuries."[24] It is quite a telling support of Räisänen's lament that the co-editors of this dictionary should admit in the preface that "neither of us had really appreciated the full extent of the ways in which the Bible has been perceived, or the importance it has had in different areas of religious and cultural life."[25] Another collection of research that focuses on the literary impact of scripture is the Dictionary of

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[20]For an example of the analysis of the effects of the misuse of Revelation see K G C Newport, "Revelation 13 and the Papal Antichrist in Eighteenth-Century England: A Study in New Testament Eisegesis", Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester 79 (1997): 91-103.

[21]Prior, pp. 13-14. In other words you can only analyse one aspect of a phenomenon at a time without corrupting the data or one's analysis of it.

[22]Räisänen, p. 310.

[23]R L Coggins and J L Houlden (eds.), A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation (London: SCM Press, 1990).

[24]Ibid., p. *v*.

[25]Ibid.

Biblical Tradition in English Literature.[26] This volume goes beyond being a list of citations and purely literary discussion, to explore some of the ways in which certain biblical texts, phrases and motifs have affected English language and thinking.

Other research and publishing projects include an on-going series of papers on the history of the interpretation of Romans by the 'Romans' group of the Society of Biblical Literature, and a forthcoming commentary series to be published by Blackwells. This latter plans to have *Wirkungsgeschichte* as a major component in each volume.[27] It remains to be seen whether it will succeed in this where the *Evangelisch-katholischer Kommentar* failed. The advent of the journal Biblical Interpretation in 1993 has also allowed for some contributions to be made in this field.

### 3. Work on the History of the Influence of Revelation

Not much material had been produced on the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the Apocalypse until relatively recently. But this was hardly because of any lack of influence or effect that Revelation has had on human history. Ever since its composition at the end of the first century[28] that influence has been immense. Indeed, in D H Lawrence's opinion "it has had, and perhaps still has more influence, actually, than the Gospels or the great Epistles."[29] The reticence to delve into this subject may have been because it is so vast, so far-ranging and, in some cases, uncomfortable to deal with. There have been

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[26]D L Jeffrey (ed.), A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1992).

[27]General editors of the series will be J Sawyer and C Rowland with the first volumes due to appear in 2001.

[28]This thesis accepts the majority view that Revelation was written during the reign of Domitian, c. 95 CE. See the extensive recent discussion on dating Revelation in D E Aune, Revelation 1-5, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books, 1997), pp. *lvi-lxx*.

[29]D H Lawrence, Apocalypse (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1974), p. 7. First published in 1931.

some very unsavoury effects of the text of Revelation, which Lawrence goes on to expose, for he recognises that:

> . . . it has no doubt been the greatest source of inspiration of the vast mass of Christian minds . . . since the first century, and we realize, to our horror, that this is what we are up against today; not Jesus or Paul, but John of Patmos.[30]

This might not be a scholarly view but it is daunting none the less to contemplate the extremes of Revelation's influence, ranging from Holman Hunt's painting, 'The Light of the World' to Münster or even Waco.

Nevertheless, certain scholars would agree with Lawrence as to the range and impact of the Apocalypse's effect:

> Throughout history Revelation not only has engendered speculation about the course of history or the timing of the end events, but it has also inspired Western cultural imaginations. More than any other book in the Christian canon, Revelation has profoundly influenced Western art and literature.[31]

For some time the analytical approaches taken to Revelation (see sections below on late nineteenth and early twentieth-century scholarship, pp. 31-61) tended to obscure its influence and rhetorical effectiveness. However, more recently even scholars working on Revelation in the more traditional way have acknowledged the need for, and legitimacy of, research in the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the Apocalypse. L L Thompson's

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[30] Ibid., p. 14.
[31] Schüssler Fiorenza, Revelation: Vision of a Just World, p. 18.

work focuses primarily on the politics and sociology of Revelation's *Sitz im Leben*.[32] It is a study that is therefore grounded in the first century and the meaning of the text to its first readers. However, Thompson states that:

> The Book of Revelation is, then – like all texts – an ongoing accomplishment, an ever-recurring acquisition. Further, none of us reads it fresh in the Garden of Eden. We receive it in a tradition of readers who connect us to the text – often through complicated, unrecognized links – and who shape what we see.[33]

Thompson would even like to see the production of the history of the reading of Revelation, though he recognises the daunting nature of such a task. However, he does state that it is important for the modern reader and interpreter to "be as aware as possible of the 'tradition of readers' through which he or she reads the Book of Revelation. That awareness can often clarify conversation in a pluralistic context."[34]

Many volumes of research have been produced on the history of the interpretation and ecclesiastical use of Revelation, and a number of them will be referred to below, especially in Chapter Four. However, it is important to distinguish between this kind of work and the research need that Räisänen identifies. Work like that of Bauckham,[35] McGinn[36], Patrides and Wittreich and others[37] is essentially ecclesiastical

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[32]L L Thompson, The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

[33]Ibid., p. 3.

[34]Ibid.

[35]R Bauckham, Tudor Apocalypse (Oxford: Sutton Courtenay Press, 1978).

[36]B McGinn, Apocalyptic Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1979).

[37]C Patrides and J Wittreich (eds.), The Apocalypse in English Renaissance Thought and Literature (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984); also C Burdon, The Apocalypse in England: Revelation Unravelling, 1700-1834 (London: Macmillan, 1997).

history. Generally speaking it does not deal with the relationship between the rhetoric of the text, that is, its attempt to influence, and the actual influence it has had.

Some biblical scholars and church historians, however, are exploring the area of Revelation's influence although it is perhaps inevitable that there is overlap between this and the history of ecclesiastic interpretation.[38] Some articles and monographs produced in the last decade demonstrate the breadth of this field and the way it impacts on other areas of academic and non-academic enquiry.[39] A further example of this is the exhibition on the Apocalypse, planned to mark the end of the second Christian millennium, which will be held at the British Museum from December 1999.[40]

## 4. *Wirkungsgeschichte* and History of Interpretation

The term *Wirkungsgeschichte* was first brought to prominence in religious studies by Hans-Georg Gadamer although he did not apply it in a systematic way to biblical research.[41] The work of Ulrich Luz, however, has done much to bring the history of the influence of a biblical text within the bounds of New Testament study.

Every interpretation and critique is coloured by the critic's own preconceptions and shaped by his or her own personal and cultural agenda. (A critic being not only the academic but rather any reader who seriously seeks meaning in the text.) So although the historical critical method is still a productive method for the New Testament scholar

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[38]Worth noting in this area, particularly regarding Revelation, are works like A W Wainwright, Mysterious Apocalypse: Interpreting the Book of Revelation (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993).

[39]E.g. J M Ford, "Visual Arts and the Apocalypse", Bible Today 34 (1996): 366-373, which focuses primarily on painting and sculpture; G Maier, "Das Verständnis der Johannesoffenbarung in der Kirchengeschichte", Kerygma und Dogma 43 (1997): 151-163, which looks at how the interpretation of Revelation affects the way a community views the rest of the Bible; F R Mwombeki, "The Book of Revelation in Africa", Word and World 15 (1995): 145-150, which examines the results of certain reading strategies of Revelation in African Christianity.

[40]A description of the exhibition is available on the World Wide Web at: www.british.museum.ac.uk/exhibitions/apocalypse/index.html

[41]Räisänen, pp. 305-306.

to use, there is a need to augment it with alternative strategies. Recognition of this has given rise to many new and creative approaches to biblical interpretation.

Luz is convinced that the history of the interpretation of a biblical book can greatly contribute to the understanding of it for both scholar and believer.[42] He defines his terms thus:

> History of interpretation is "the history of the interpretation of a text in commentaries and other theological writings."
>
> *Wirkungsgeschichte* is "the history, reception, and actualisation of a text in media other than the commentary, thus, e.g., in sermons, canonical law, hymnody, art, and in the actions and suffering of the church."[43]

These two are closely related but it is important to recognise that the history of influence, *Wirkungsgeschichte*, is inclusive of the history of interpretation. It therefore includes the response of the first audience, a traditional area of interest for New Testament studies. But it goes beyond this, and beyond the scientific study of scripture.

For Luz the function of *Wirkungsgeschichte* is not to write "an unbroken overview of the history of influence in chronological sequence. Rather the history of influence should aid in leading the interpretation of a text to our present time." He hopes also to alleviate "a major problem of historical-critical exegesis today (which) lies in isolating a text in its own time and its own situation of origin . . . thus preventing it from speaking to the present time."[44]

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[42]Luz, Matthew 1-7, p. 9.
[43]Ibid., p. 95.
[44]Ibid., p. 96.

Functionally "the history of interpretation and the history of influence are meant to help us understand *how* each interpreter is influenced by the texts." Thereby, "it illuminates the prehistory of one's pre-understanding."[45] These histories also call attention to the power of the texts to become alive in each new situation. Thus *Wirkungsgeschichte* can explore aspects of the text-reader relationship that might begin to bridge the gulf between biblical studies and hermeneutics, textual criticism and church history.

Of course *Wirkungsgeschichte* has its limitation. As Luz says "one does not yet understand what the subject matter of the text *means* if one understands what it *has meant*. It is an aid to 'dealing with the subject matter itself' and helps to break through from interpreting to understanding." Through it we recall "the fullness of the potential meaning which is inherent in biblical texts. It reminds us of the fact that biblical texts do not have simply a set, closed meaning but are full of possibilities."[46] So juxtaposing varying interpretations from different centuries is not just done for curiosity, interesting though it can be. Rather it demonstrates "that the texts are full of possibilities of application which do not exclude each other."[47] Thus the reading or criticism of a text need no longer be like examining the body of a long dead, though fascinating and noble dinosaur. Rather it is the examination of a living, active text with which society has had a dynamic and changing relationship.

Räisänen seeks to define 'effective history' (as he translates *Wirkungsgeschichte*) by distinguishing it from both the formation of authoritative tradition and the history of interpretation. It is inclusive of biblical influence on confessional traditions, but it goes

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[45]Ibid., p. 97, his emphasis.
[46]Ibid., p. 98, his emphasis.

beyond Luz's understanding to include certain heterodox theologies as well as social and political effects. What is more, it is important for the church to recognise that factors other than the Bible have helped formulate their creeds and doctrine.[48]

Räisänen suggests different approaches and models for this kind of research project. These include following the influence of a particular pericope; researching general biblical influence on a particular culture, or time period; looking at specific social issues in terms of biblical effect, such as the condemnation of homosexuality; and tracing the influence of a particular theme.[49] But he is critical of the fact that, "Luz still confines the 'effective history' of the Bible to the church"[50], and would rather that it embraced a broader perspective:

> Important effects of the Bible are palpable in areas *not* limited to the church: customs, legislation, politics, culture at large. Moreover, it is all-important that one wrestle with the actual empirical effects of the Bible.
>
> One must not succumb to the temptation of omitting *harmful* effects in order to prove say, the special authority of the Bible.[51]

This is indeed an exciting and vast challenge to religious studies and it can only be hoped that scholars continue to respond to it in increasing numbers.

## 5. The Aims of This Thesis

This thesis makes no attempt to be an exhaustive study of the influence of Revelation or even the pericope of the seven messages of Revelation 2-3. In fact it focuses on the repentance call in the message to the Laodiceans. However, from a

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[47]Ibid., p. 99.
[48]Räisänen, pp. 306-309.
[49]Ibid., pp. 318-319.
[50]Ibid., p. 313.

rhetorical critical and *Wirkungsgeschichte* perspective this is not an arbitrary or whimsical choice, but one that has a bearing on the larger issue of the far-reaching persuasive power of sacred texts generally, and prophetic utterance in particular. In exploring the dynamic relationship between scripture and its audience there is no better place to start than with a call to repentance. For it is certain that a prophet's address to a back-slidden or spiritually lax community will have been uttered with the intent of causing well defined behavioural changes in its audience. It is therefore likely to contain a clearly discernible rhetorical strategy[52].

The Christian community of Laodicea in the late first century CE was just such a spiritually lax community, at least as portrayed by John. The implied readers of the last of the seven messages are spiritually blind, deluded and lukewarm. They are called upon to make specified changes to their behaviour, morality and ideology. The rhetorical situation implied in the text is therefore a rich and dynamic one. The decision to focus primarily on the Laodicean repentance call is also based on the fact that its history of influence contains unusual episodes that make the text's effect more evident. Certain interpretive communities have read it as applying specifically, or even exclusively to them, to the extent of believing it to be an inspired prediction of their nation or believing community. This has led to a hyper-dynamic relationship with the text and a susceptibility to its rhetorical strategy. Such communities considered themselves to be addressed in a manner and with a prophetic directness that had probably not happened since the primary audience of Asia Minor first received John's letter. The history of this

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[51]Ibid., pp. 313-314. His emphasis.

[52]See B Wicklander, Prophecy as Literature: A Text-Linguistic and Rhetorical Approach to Isaiah 2-4, Coniectanea Biblica Old Testament Series, 22 (Malmö: CWK Gleerup, 1984), especially the section on literary intent, pp. 226-241.

effect, on two distinct historical communities, is explored in Chapters Four and Five, below.

In the larger analysis, sacred texts and utterances are part of a stream of literary influence, or consciousness, extending into the past and future from the point of the text's initial composition. As Luz says:

> The biblical texts themselves are the result of a history of effects because they are not the ultimate point of departure nor the ultimate authority but products of human reception, human experiences, and human history. . . . Thus the conception of "history of effects" reminds us of the human, historical, secondary character of our texts.[53]

By 'texts' Luz is referring to the synoptic Gospels, but for Revelation it is equally as valid to go beyond *Wirkungsgeschichte*, as defined above, and explore a history of effects – plural. All New Testament texts – from the level of pericope, through book, to corpus - have a post-production influence, but they have also been created by a complex collection of influences.

Thus, they have a pre-existence in the literary and theological influences operating upon their authors and their first audiences. They also have a contemporary existence relating to their primary audience, their inter-textual relationships with the rest of the work (and maybe even other works if they are read as a part of a canon, corpus or sacred collection) and they have a polyvalent *Sitz im Leben*. Lastly, and open-endedly, they have a post-existence in their *Wirkungsgeschichte*, as discussed above.

This thesis will try to explore all these aspects of Rev 3:14-22, the Laodicean message, primarily in the context of the rhetorical dynamic of the repentance call. Other

aspects of the Laodicean pericope, the seven letters, and Revelation as a whole will be explored in order to establish the background, context and setting.

The approach taken to the messages in the early era of historical-critical analysis of Revelation was enlightening in many respects. However, it was problematic in that it lead to the messages being viewed as separate to the rest of the Apocalypse. It also drew attention away from the literary power of the text and the author's rhetorical intent. More recent literary approaches have opened the text up in a different way and rhetorical criticism in particular has focused on the persuasive power of the text,[54] a power that is also evident when the history of its effect is studied.

It is therefore hoped that this study will provide illumination in a number of areas, including:

- Tracing the influence of certain prophetic forms and ideas.
- Exploring the power of a text to influence and persuade.
- Examining how the author sought to effectuate change via his rhetorical method.
- Looking for indicators that, even in unorthodox interpretations, some of the intent of the original author can remain and still be influential.
- Tracing how the value of a particular text, within an interpretive community, is effected and changed by the hermeneutical strategy employed to interpret it.

## 6. The Text and the Audience

Finally a word about texts, their authors and their audiences as they will be dealt with in this thesis, is necessary here.

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[53]Luz, Matthew in History, p. 23.
[54]Rhetorical Criticism of Revelation is analysed in some detail below, pp. 70-78.

Particularly with the rhetorical analysis of repentance calls there is something to be gained from studying the perspective of the reader as well as the writer. But, by including actual 'reader-responses' selected from the history of the interpretation of Revelation, extra illumination can be shed on the reader-text dynamics that operate within the Apocalypse. Because the interpretive communities selected here believed themselves specifically to be identified and addressed, their response and the effect of the text are accentuated. As this is incorporated into the thesis as a whole I believe it will assist the reader in following a long stream of influence in religious thinking and history, an influence obscured for a time by more extreme applications of the historical-critical (or archaeological context) method.

When an audience or community accepts a text as canonical 'Scripture' they submit to its authority and accept its truth claims, at least within certain cultural parameters.[55] There are many factors involved in this text/audience relationship but they include the fact that "in the final canonical form of the text the redactor prepared it for an authoritative rôle within the communal context."[56] Thus a call for change and repentance cannot simply be ignored. Although, as Watson goes on to show clearly, just because a text is accepted as canonical does not mean that a community will agree on its meaning even though they agree on its level of authority.[57] Hence, the repentance call may be adapted or transferred when those receiving the message deflect it onto another contemporary audience and thereby shift their rhetorical position in the dialogue from that of reader to author. That is, they identify with the implied writer and redirect his call

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[55]R Detweiler, "What is a Sacred Text?", Semeia 31 (1985): 213-230, especially pp. 223-228.
[56]Watson, p. 43.
[57]Ibid., pp. 30-45.

to those they deem to be in particular need of hearing the words of castigation. Evidence of this type of response to the text will be shown below.

This study also accepts that "the significance of the final form of the biblical text is that it alone bears witness to the full history of revelation."[58] This preference for the final form is the most productive to take when looking at rhetorical analysis and the history of textual effects. It will generally be taken as the norm throughout the thesis.

## B. The Study of Revelation 2 and 3 from the Late Nineteenth Century to the Late Twentieth Century

### 1. Early Giants

In the study of the book of Revelation the work of R H Charles[59] is rightly seen as a watershed, both in English language studies and beyond[60]. In particular Charles' two volume commentary in the International Critical Commentary series casts a long shadow into twentieth-century Revelation studies. Despite being written over eighty years ago it continues to inform Bible students and must still be taken into account by critics. Many of Charles' views and findings, that were originally ground breaking, are now disputed or abandoned by contemporary writers on Revelation. But it is still necessary for those engaged in the study of the Apocalypse to have a good reason for

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[58]Childs, Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture, pp. 75-76.

[59]R H Charles, Studies in the Apocalypse (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1915); A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John, Vol. I-II, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1920); Lectures on the Apocalypse (London: Oxford University Press, 1922).

[60]Reference to Charles and recognition of his contribution to the study of Revelation are to be found far and wide; e.g. E B Allo, Saint Jean, L'Apocalypse (Paris, Librairie Lecoffre, 1933), p. *cclxviii*. Lohmeyer, E Die Offenbarung des Johannes, Handbuch zum Neuen Testament, 16 (Tübingen: J C B Mohr, 1926), pp 2-3. André Feuillet, calls Charles' commentary a "monumental work" and "this masterpiece" in his survey of work on Revelation. A Feuillet, The Apocalypse (New York: St Paul Publications, 1965), p. 12. Many other accolades and influences could be shown.

contradicting Charles. His views, and legacy in relation to the study of Revelation 2-3, will be analysed below (pp. 52-55).

Charles is not the only early twentieth-century, English language scholar to make a long lasting mark on the study of Revelation. Particularly for the study of Revelation 2 and 3, John's 'letters' to the seven churches of Asia Minor, an earlier work set the agenda, tone and general approach for decades to follow. That work was William Ramsay's The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia and their Place in the Plan of the Apocalypse.[61] This work's continuing popularity and longevity is demonstrated by the fact that it was republished some ninety years after its first appearance.[62]

Ramsay sets out to demonstrate that the text of Rev 2:1-3:22 is copiously informed by the geography, history and sociology of the seven towns addressed, and that therefore John knew these towns intimately. By and large Ramsay developed good evidence for this argument, producing many correlations between aspects of the text and the religion, politics, geography and history of the seven towns of Asia Minor. These cities were Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea. Their archaeological sites all lie in what is now south-west Turkey and can be visited by the modern tourist.

As well as demonstrating much about the authenticity and integrity of the Apocalypse, Ramsay and those who followed his methodology gave the reader an insight into the geo-political *Sitz im Leben* of John and his group of communities. This line of enquiry resulted in a strong and often exclusive emphasis on the historical value

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[61] W M Ramsay, The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia and their Place in the Plan of the Apocalypse (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1904).

[62] M W Wilson (ed.), William M Ramsay's The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia and their Place in the Plan of the Apocalypse (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishing, 1994).

and function of the seven messages in the study of the Apocalypse at the expense of their literary and rhetorical function. This in turn has tended to dictate where they stand in relation to the rest of the book. Thus it has become widely accepted that:

> . . . the letters to the seven churches constitute the section (of Revelation) in which the historical situation is most explicit and approachable. Here is the key to the easiest lock in an admittedly difficult text.[63]

Other ways of approaching the messages have been explored and functions other than that of historical preface, or key, have been postulated and will be analysed below. But for the bulk of the century such views have had to struggle against Ramsay's approach. Of course this is not really surprising because, from an archaeological and genre perspective at least, a septet of "letters" sent to identifiable places is both accessible and attractive to the twentieth-century mind, relatively speaking. Ramsay's methodological approach to the letters will be analysed in more detail below.

## 2. An "Anti-Historicist" Agenda?

As will be shown in the chapters of this thesis that examine selected seventeenth-century (below pp. 218-271) and nineteenth-century (below, pp. 272-320) interpretations of the messages, one strong, long lasting and popular hermeneutical tradition has interpreted the whole of Revelation, and in turn the messages to the seven churches, as predictive prophecy. In this view each of the seven churches represented a distinct period of ecclesiastical history, with Ephesus representing Christendom in the first century and Laodicea representing it immediately prior to the second advent. John,

according to this view, had been shown the entire history of the Christian church in vision. Thus the details of each message could be seen to correlate with historical happenings and the church's spiritual characteristics in each of these periods of time.

The term 'historicist' is usually used to describe this interpretive strategy. This term can be confusing as it is quite different from what is normally meant by historical or even historicist. However, it is widely used by church historians for interpretations that consider biblical prophecy to be predictive history, especially those that assign time periods and specific historical events to biblical motifs.[64] It will continue to be used in this way throughout the thesis. This interpretation also brought Revelation 2-3 into a recapitulatory[65] relationship with other 'predictive' passages in Revelation. It also allowed for a specific kind of persuasive effect among those who applied a passage or motif to their own time or interpretive community. The history and influence of the historicist interpretation of the letters will be dealt with in Chapters Four and Five.

This hermeneutic originated in the mid-sixteenth century amongst the dissenting community of Protestant England and "dominated British and American exegesis from (the) late seventeenth century to the middle of (the) nineteenth century."[66] In fact it will be shown that the legacy of historicism was still felt in the early part of the twentieth century. The most significant and weighty English commentary of the nineteenth century

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[63]C J Hemer. The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in their Local Setting. Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series. 11 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press. 1986). p. 1.

[64]See for instance K Arasola. The End of Historicism: Millerite Hermeneutics of Time Prophecies in the Old Testament (Uppsala: Uppsala University Press. 1989).

[65]Recapitulation in predictive prophecy is where a later passage is believed to be dealing with the same historical period as a previous passage but in more detail or from a different perspective. See also below. p. 225.

[66]Arasola. p. 28. On the history of this interpretive scheme see pp. 28-42. See also Bauckham. Tudor Apocalypse. p. 140.

was the four volume Horæ Apocalypticæ which by the 1860s was in its fifth edition.[67] This work was thoroughly historicist for Revelation 4-22 but not for the seven messages of Revelation 2-3. Nevertheless Elliott recognises the fact that the messages were interpreted as prophetic predictions and included a chart detailing the dating of the churches in church history by significant proponents of the scheme.[68]

It is possible that, combined with other spiritualising and allegorising interpretive schemes, historicism continued to pose a challenge to the historical-critical method which, at this time, was still generally unappreciated by the church-going public. Many English and American academic commentaries on the Apocalypse, towards the end of the nineteenth century and even after it, still applied space to countering the historicist interpretation of Revelation 2-3. Some even devoted special sections to disproving it because it was the majority view in popular commentaries.[69]

Trench's work on the letters has an eighteen page special section that argues strongly against the historicist interpretation of the church, but is respectful of it and those who accept it.[70] Twenty years later Tait's The Message to the Seven Churches in Asia Minor[71] also spends some time debating the historicist view but is able to be more dismissive. (Both Trench and Tait were prominent churchmen.) F D Maurice, writing around the same time, sums up the appeal of the historicist application of the letters:

> These messages have been accepted by readers who see little meaning in the other parts of the book or despair of finding its meaning, as having

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[67]E B Elliott, Horæ Apocalypticæ, Vol. I-IV, Fifth Edition (London: Seeley, Jackson and Halliday, 1862).

[68]Ibid., Vol. I, p. 77.

[69]Arasola, pp. 41-48.

[70]E Trench, Epistle to the Seven Churches (London: Parker, Son & Bourn, 1867), pp. 226-243. Trench was an Anglican Archbishop and his work continued to be printed as late as 1890.

> great practical worth. In every period of the history of Christendom they have been felt to have a force for *that* period.[72]

Although Maurice is opposed to the historicist interpretive scheme he recognises that its popularity and persistence demonstrate that, "the revelation which this book contains is a revelation of that which abides, of that which is not dependant upon circumstances."[73]

Swete's commentary[74], though overshadowed by Charles', is still recognised as a work of depth and scholarly achievement today. Yet although published as late as 1917 it still takes the time to engage with the 'letters-as-predictive-history' hermeneutic in its third edition. Swete is somewhat disdainful of the view but aware of its details:

> Only the most perverse ingenuity can treat the messages of the Seven Churches as directly prophetical . . . No one who realises that the prophecy is an answer to the crying needs of the Seven Churches will dream of treating it as a detailed forecast of the course of medieval and modern history in Western Europe.[75]

Even as late as the 1930 writers were concerned about the misleading effects of the stubborn historicism scheme, particularly as it applied to the seven messages. One writer began his exegesis of Revelation 2-3 by insisting, "We must here, at the outset remove the greatest source of all the misunderstandings which have arisen with regard to these

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[71]A Tait. The Message to the Seven Churches in Asia Minor (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1884), pp. *xvi-xvx*.

[72]F D Maurice, Lectures on the Apocalypse (London: Macmillan. 1885), p. 31. His emphasis.

[73]Ibid., p. 32.

[74]H B Swete. The Apocalypse of John, Third Edition (London: Macmillan, 1917), pp. *ccxiv-ccxviii*.

[75]Ibid., pp. *ccxvii-ccxviii*.

seven churches."[76] He then spends ten pages demonstrating the implausibility of a historicist interpretation of the messages.

A reason for mentioning this here, as well as introducing an interpretive scheme that is of significance to this thesis, is that it gives a background and suggests possible motivations for the strong historical and archaeological emphasis in works like Ramsay's. Certain popular works on Revelation from quite mainstream sources clung to, and continued to develop, this 'un-scientific' view, which had been popular since late puritan times. Many examples of this could be given but three or four must suffice.

T B Baines' work on Revelation contains an early section entitled "Historical Character of the Churches" in which he draws attention to "the remarkable coincidence between the history of Christendom, and the state of the churches in the order in which it is unfolded in these epistles."[77] Moberly, who interprets all of Revelation as predictive prophecy, likens the seven letters to a gentle, somewhat spiritual introduction to the historical prophecies of Revelation. But he is certain that they "have a close connection with the seven (time) Periods".[78] Milligan's The Revelation of St. John,[79] which is a collection of his 1885 Baird lectures, does not hold to any kind of detailed "historicist" interpretation of the messages but he strongly rejects Preterism. Preterism is the hermeneutical scheme in which Revelation is understood to contain no predictive prophecy and all its symbolism and references are contemporary to the time of writing[80].

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[76]E W Bullinger, The Apocalypse, Third Edition (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1935), p. 63. Bullinger actually finds a reflection of the spiritual history of Israel in the letters.

[77]T B Baines, The Revelation of Jesus Christ (London: G Morrish, 1911), pp. 61-63.

[78]C A Moberly, Five Visions of Revelation (London: Mowbray, 1905), p. 294. He goes on to show how the predictive septets of Revelation build on each other in a recapitulatory fashion, pp. 295f.

[79]W Milligan, The Revelation of St. John (London: Macmillan, 1886).

[80]Ibid., pp. 139-146.

Milligan says of the letters "All the elements of the future of the Church are found in one part or another of these two chapters."[81]

Another occurrence of more obvious adherence to "historicism" is to be found in an approved Roman Catholic work on the Apocalypse. J J Elar's The Apocalypse, the Antichrist and the End comes complete with a *nihil obstat* and puts forward the view that the Laodicean age "begins at the undefined period when the present age ends, and it ends with the end of the world."[82] It is important to recognise that such interpretations were contemporary with Ramsay. This helps partially to explain his passion for emphasising the factual history of the towns of Laodicea, Sardis and the rest, and the Christian communities which lived in them during the first century.

The continuation of the "historicist" interpretation, or variants of it, is referred to by Feuillet in his survey of the study of Revelation in the first two-thirds of the twentieth century. Although he notes that the scheme is now rare he is able to cite a few examples of it from the first half of this century. These mainly French works are influenced by Joachim of Fiore and to a greater or lesser degree propose that the seven messagess are a prophetic description of the history of the church.[83] Historicism continues to be remembered and argued against even by some contemporary commentators.[84]

Around the turn of the century the English school of academic interpretation of Revelation was applying the tools of the historical critical method to developing its 'preterist' view of Revelation. This produced a finely detailed exegesis of the Greek text

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[81]Ibid., p. 177.

[82]J J Elar, The Apocalypse, the AntiChrist and the End (London: Burns & Oats, 1906), p. 320.

[83]For example, J du Plessis, Les Derniers temps d'aprés l'Histoire et la Prophétie (Paris: 1937), in Feuillet, p. 15 and pp. 38-39; and L Poirier, "Les sept Eglises ou le premier septenaire prophétique de l'Apocalypse", (PhD thesis, 1943), in Feuillet, p. 42.

and the application of the tools of scientific criticism. This interpretive scheme held that Revelation's material addressed issues relevant to its first readers. This necessitated scholarly enquiry which could demonstrate that Revelation was firmly anchored into first century history. No part of Revelation has more obvious anchor points in first century history than the letters of chapters 2 and 3.

It is also possible that, in part, works like Ramsay's acted as a counter to the eschatological interpretations of Revelation that were popular in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Germany. Ramsay's work does bear the hallmarks of research conducted with an agenda. However, before further developing reasons for Ramsay's emphasis and its problematic results, it is necessary to look in detail at his work on the seven messages of Revelation 2-3.

## 3. The Historical Context Approach: W M Ramsay and his Legacy

### a. Ramsay's Motivation

An important objective for William Ramsay in writing The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia and their Place in the Plan of the Apocalypse was to communicate, to as wide an audience as possible, the historical reality of the seven communities to which Revelation was addressed. He believed that the historicity and culture of the seven churches, and the cities in which they existed, were important things for late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Christians to understand for their own sake.[85] They also provided a relatively accessible doorway into the classical world. A study of this material would act as a demonstration of modern Christianity's heritage and its linkage with

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[84]D Guthrie, The Relevance of John's Apocalypse (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1987), pp. 70-72.

[85]Ramsay, Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia, pp. vii-ix and 39-41. Ramsay had produced a sizeable corpus of popular work on Near Eastern biblical archaeology in the 1890s. His The Church in

historically real first-century Christian communities.[86] In order to accomplish his goal Ramsay wrote in an accessible style and included numerous photographic plates, diagrams, drawings and charts in his work. In fact Ramsay's desire to propagate his conception of the letters and Revelation was perceived by some of his peers as both populist and overly apologetic and for this he received undue criticism.[87]

b. Ramsay's Approach and Findings

Ramsay's basic approach to the material found in the messages of Revelation 2-3 is threefold, and can be categorised thus:

Firstly he sets out to open up the book of Revelation to the contemporary reader.

Secondly he uses it as a window into first-century Graeco-Roman Asia Minor.

Thirdly he demonstrates the dynamic nature of the relationship between John and the communities to whom he wrote.

Ramsay wants to explain what the letters would have meant to their first recipients by pointing out in great detail how they would have been received and understood by each separate Christian community. Hence one of Ramsay's main tenets of interpretation was that a knowledge of the history, geography, economics and politics of, for instance, Laodicea was the vital key to the understanding of what John meant to say in Rev 3:14-22. It is also the vital element in revealing what the Laodicean Christians of the late first century would have understood the passage to have meant.

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the Roman Empire Before A.D. 170 (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1903), is mainly made up of lectures given in 1892.

[86]Ramsay was at pains to demonstrate that the scientific study of Scripture need not undermine its historical accuracy or spiritual authority, as the title of his The Bearing of Recent Discovery on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1915), illustrates.

[87]According to Hemer, p. 25.

It is also important to note that Ramsay believed that in each of the letters the author of Revelation addressed the specific needs and situation of each Christian community individually. Thus:

> The letters were written by one who was familiar with the situation, the character . . . of those Seven Cities. The Church of Sardis for example, is addressed as the Church of that actual, single city: the facts and characteristics mentioned are proper to it alone, and not common to the other Churches of the Hermus Valley. Those others were not much in the writer's mind: he was absorbed with thought of that one city . . . [88]

This is a fairly extreme position in the spectrum of ideas developed by twentieth century scholarship on the individuality of the letters and their relation to one another.

c. Some Examples of Ramsay's Method

In order to give a synopsis of Ramsay's method and help demonstrate why his legacy has been difficult to leave behind, a few examples of his method of drawing out the local allusions within the text of the letters are included below.

i. Ephesus

One of the applications of the text that Ramsay makes for the Ephesian letter centres around the fact that the city of Ephesus had moved its location over the centuries. This was due to the periodic silting up of its harbour and subsequent relocation of some of the city's key features.

> In Ephesus it is the shifting character of the natural conditions on which the city depends for prosperity that strikes every careful observer . . . The city followed the sea, and changed from place to place to maintain its

> importance as the only harbour of the valley. . . . A threat of removing the Church from its place would be inevitably understood by the Ephesians as a denunciation of another change in the site of the city, and must have been so intended by the writer. Ephesus and its Church should be taken up, and moved away to a new spot, where it might begin afresh on a new career with a better spirit. But it would be still Ephesus, as it had always hitherto been amid all changes.[89]

The biblical reference to removing the church from its place is found in Rev 2:5, which Ramsay translates, "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I come to thee and will move thy candlestick out of its place, except thou repent."

ii. Sardis

Ramsay spends some pages in reviewing the military history of Sardis, concentrating on its fall from being the capital of the Lydian empire under Croesus to being a modest provincial town. He emphasises Sardis' arrogant belief in its reputation for impregnability in ancient times and the well known tales[90] of how carelessness and complacency led to its defeat on a number of occasions.

> It was the city whose history conspicuously and pre-eminently blazoned forth the uncertainty of human fortunes, the weakness of human strength, and the shortness of the step that separates over-confident might from sudden and irreparable disaster.[91]

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[88]Ramsay, The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia, p. 40.

[89]Ibid., pp. 245-246.

[90]These are found in Herodotus, Polybius and other ancient sources. Hemer, pp. 132-134 and 256-258.

[91]The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia, p. 376.

Ramsay locks this aspect of Sardian history into the text of Rev 3:2-3 which he translates "Be thou watchful, and stablish the things that remain, which were ready to die . . . If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee." He explains:

> No one can doubt that this Sardian letter took its form in part through the memory of that ancient history. It was impossible for the Sardians to miss the allusions, and therefore the writer must have intended it and calculated on it. Phrase after phrase is chosen for the evident purpose of recalling that ancient memory . . .[92]

iii. Laodicea

Ramsay systematically points out the various features of Laodicean history, society and geography that he considers to have corresponding features in the letter. The manufacturing of clothes relates to "buy from me . . . white clothes" (Rev 3:18a). Laodicea's famous medical school and eye ointment industry are John's source for the references to blindness and eye ointment (Rev 3:17b-18). The infamous Laodicean shunning of Roman offers of assistance after the 60 CE earthquake is easily and heavily applied by Ramsay to "I am rich . . . and I have no need of anything" (Rev 3:17a).[93]

Ramsay sees the Laodicean letter as the only one to be universally scathing of its church, with no one in the community untouched by John's bitter and ironic condemnation. Due, however, to what he knows of the city from his historical investigations and his interpretation of Rev 3:14-22 Ramsay holds that there is no likelihood that John's advice was accepted or his repentance call heeded.

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[92]Ibid., p. 379.
[93]Ibid., pp. 416-430.

It is characteristic of a city devoted to commercial interests and the material side of life, that the Church of Laodicea is entirely self-satisfied. It says, as the city said in AD 60, when it recovered its prosperity after the great earthquake without any of that help which the Imperial government was generally ready to bestow, and which the greatest cities of Asia had always been ready to accept, "*I have grown rich, and have need of nothing*". It has never seen its real condition: it is *poor and blind and naked*.[94]

In a way that probably betrays a certain cultural bias or idealism, Ramsay also points out that the city of Laodicea had failed to have much impact in terms of spreading Hellenistic culture. Despite having an advantageous geographical and military location, political influence and wealth, it was very inward looking. In fact he even refers to Laodicea as being "a missionary city charged at first with the task of spreading Greek civilisation and speech in barbarian Phrygia, and afterwards undertaking the duty of spreading Christianity in that country."[95] Although he does not say so specifically, Ramsay obviously holds that there is strong connection between the failure of both church and city to realise their greater destiny.

iv. Analysis of Ramsay's Method

Some of the allusions that Ramsay finds in the text seem unlikely and imply perhaps more civic, literary and historical knowledge than John was likely to have had. Others would be missed by all but an extremely obsessive reader. But, by and large, his approach is enlightening, and an awareness of his, and subsequent similar findings,

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[94]Ibid., p. 428. His italics.
[95]Ibid., p. 415.

certainly makes visiting the archaeological sites of the seven cities more intriguing and engaging. After Ramsay there remains little doubt that John not only knew the cities personally and had visited them but he also deliberately worked local allusions into the text with considerable skill. It is therefore highly likely that these allusions had a rhetorical impact on the first readers of the Apocalypse. John's authority and prophetic reputation among the Christians of Asia Minor would also have been enhanced by his demonstration, and clever use, of local knowledge.

d. What the Letters Reveal About John

Ramsay deals with the author of Revelation both directly and indirectly in some depth and subsequently some specific concepts regarding John's rôle and authority arise. Ramsay's work establishes the idea of the author as the caring Pastor intimately aware of the needs of his flock and attempting to deal with them from an enforced distance.

> It is a psychological impossibility that these Letters to the Asian Churches could have been written except by one who felt himself, and had the right to feel himself, charged with the superintendence and oversight of all those Churches, invested with Divinely given and absolute authority over them and gifted by long knowledge and sympathy with insight into their nature and circumstances . . .[96]

Of course Ramsay's very approach itself creates a certain picture of the author. If John was aware of all of the detail of the local history of each city going back to well before Alexander, he must have been a man of considerable education and personal resources. With this implication behind his method, Ramsay establishes good reason for why John was a powerfully influential character in the early Christian church of Asia Minor.

Ramsay believed that the John of Revelation was also the author of the Fourth Gospel and this places him on the conservative wing of English scholarship at the turn of the century. For instance H B Swete, a near contemporary of Ramsay's, cannot be so dogmatic about authorship. He shies away from any linkage between Apostle and Seer as far as authorship of the Apocalypse is concerned.[97]

e. The Language of the Letters

Ramsay considers the letters to be superior to the rest of Revelation in a number of different ways. He states:

> The Apocalypse would be quite complete without the Seven Letters: chapter *iv.* follows chapter *i.* naturally. The Seven Letters spring from the sense of reality, the living vigorous instinct, from which the Christian spirit can never free itself. An Apocalypse could not content St. John: it did not bring him in close enough relation to his churches.[98]

In Ramsay's view, however, the letters brought John into a very close relation to his churches. So at this early stage in Ramsay's work the letters are pronounced superior to the rest of Revelation in terms of their ability to express the essence of the author's intent. One reason for this is that he believes them to be superior literature to the rest of the Apocalypse. Ramsay states emphatically that in the letters John is writing in a way that is more suited to his natural style.[99] Whereas apocalyptic was a literary fashion that hampered John, the letters are written in a style that bring out his communicative genius.

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[96]Ibid., p. 80.
[97]Swete, pp. *clxxiv-clxxxv*.
[98]Ramsay, The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia, p. 37.
[99]Ibid., p. 39.

Ramsay is quite hostile to the genre of apocalyptic, believing that "John was using an established literary form, which he adapted in a certain degree to his purposes, but which seriously fettered and impeded him by its fanciful and unreal character."[100] In fact Ramsay does not appear to be comfortable with the Jewish aspects of Revelation at all. For one thing it is his opinion that it is this that has led German writers to think that the Apocalypse is largely non-Christian in origin. However, the section of Revelation that he chose to concentrate on is free from any such contamination, for "the episode of the seven letters . . . appears to be almost entirely non-Jewish in character and certainly non-Jewish in origin and model."[101]

Apocalyptic is portrayed by Ramsay as an inferior literary device which John is never comfortable with. Hence the section of Revelation where he does not use this device is naturally superior literature. This makes these non-apocalyptic passages more appropriate and meaningful to the original audience (who Ramsay considered to be highly Hellenized) and consequently more accessible to the modern reader and interpreter. In melodramatic language he describes John's liberation from the ill-advised Jewish genre of apocalyptic. "The traditional apocalyptic form breaks in his hands, and he throws away the shattered remains."[102]

This view also shapes Ramsay's opinion of the composition of the Apocalypse and even enables him to make comparisons with other New Testament writers like 'Peter' who are less constrained by the parochialism of the culture of Palestine.[103] This evidence from the letters is part of the proof that John was in the process of enlarging

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[100]Ibid., p. 35.
[101]Ibid.
[102]Ibid., p. 36.
[103]Ibid., p. 38.

his cultural boundaries. So he must have written the apocalyptic parts first and the more sophisticated literary material, that is the letters, at a latter date. This in turn helped to prepare John to write the Fourth Gospel towards the end of his life. Late in his career John "discarded Hebrew literary models and adopted more distinctly Greek forms, and . . . his literary style and expression markedly improved at the same time."[104]

One of the shortcomings of Ramsay's work on the seven letters is that it does not really deliver what is promised in the second half of its title, "and Their Place in the Plan of the Apocalypse". Ramsay says very little about the place of the letters in the plan of the Apocalypse. Few attempts are made to develop linguistic or literary connections between Revelation 2-3 and the rest of the book. In fact at one point he refers to the hearing formula at the end of each letter as "the one link of connection"[105] between Revelation 2-3 and the rest of the Apocalypse. The result is that the letters are portrayed as self-contained, free standing entities, superior in their literary merits to the rest of Revelation. Ramsay has been criticised for this and for his somewhat disparaging views of apocalyptic and Jewish culture in general.[106]

f. Analysis of Ramsay

A sentence in Ramsay's section on the letter to Sardis sums up his approach to the letters and his enthusiasm for that approach. "The more we can learn about Sardis, the better we shall understand the letter."[107] Unfortunately this is probably not true but the importance of the affiliation between text and history is primary to the scientific study of scripture. The specific links between history and text developed by Ramsay

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[104]Ibid., p. 38.

[105]Ibid., p. 37.

[106]For a helpful and largely sympathetic explanation of Ramsay's imperialism and possible 'anti-Semitism' see S J Friesen, "Revelation, Realia, and Religion: Archaeology in the Interpretation of the Apocalypse", Harvard Theological Review 88 (1995), especially pp. 292-301.

have shaped the way that the letters have been understood for the majority of the twentieth century, obscuring their literary persuasiveness and theological agenda.

The comprehensive nature of Ramsay's work is admirable. He has chapters on the place and process of letter writing in the ancient world, the symbolism of the letters, the history of the province of Asia, the Caesar cult and so on. The net result is the development of a comprehensive *Sitz im Leben* of Revelation, albeit very much shaped by Ramsay's agenda. Both writer and first readers are steeped in the history, geography and politics of first century Asiatic Graeco-Roman society. There can be little doubt that John knew much about the history, geography, religion and politics of the communities to whom he was writing. The importance of the letters, containing as they do such intricate allusions and subtle hints, should not be underestimated. They are no mere introduction or literary device, not just an epistolic facade on an apocalyptic construction.

Hence the legacy of Ramsay for the study of Revelation 2-3 is that readers have subsequently felt that the primary function of the letters was to provide the reader with accurate historical information and an accessible relationship between biblical material and the local archaeology of Asia Minor. Because of Ramsay the letters became semi-detatched from the rest of Revelation and were often assessed using different critical criteria, and assigned to a different genre. The letters, and the communities that they address, are understood in a Greek context and the Semitic nature of the rest of Revelation was therefore felt to be in tension with this. Therefore when apocalyptic literature later gained favour in English language scholarship it resulted in a marginalization of the material seven messages.

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[107]Ramsay, The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia, p. 374.

g. Ramsay's Critics and Followers

The main agenda for those who engage Ramsay critically has been the accuracy, inaccuracy or inadequacy of Ramsay's catalogue of correlation between text and historical or geographical data. The most significant of these is Colin Hemer's The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia in Their Local Setting. Hemer and others have shown that Ramsay needs some restraining in places and that there is not really the archaeological or historical data to back up some of his assertions.[108] Some have even sought to deny local allusions completely.[109] However, there are also things that Ramsay missed or was seemingly unaware of, the main example from Laodicea being the fact that the water supply coming in to the city was so high in mineral content that it had an emetic effect on those unused to it.[110] (Mineral encrustation on pipe-work in the city is still easily visible, even to amateur observers such as myself.) This mineral content, it is now assumed, gave rise to the vomiting motif of Rev 3:16.

Hemer looks at the history and archaeology of the seven cities in the light of the letters in much the same way as Ramsay did, adding further political and historical allusions. But he has the benefit of eighty years' additional archaeological research and writes with an awareness of new critical approaches that would have been alien to Ramsay. He also does a bit more to integrate the letters into Revelation as a whole and is critical of the fact that Ramsay all but ignored their Old Testament background and

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[108]C H H Scobie, "Local References in the Letters to the Seven Churches", New Testament Studies 39 (1993): 606-624; Friesen, pp. 298-300 and Hemer, pp. 25-26. Hemer points out, however, that in a number cases Ramsay's speculations are intuitive and have been supported by later research.

[109]P Prigent, L'Apocalypse de Saint Jean (Paris: Delachaux & Niestlé, 1981), pp. 36-50.

[110]Hemer, pp. 189-190. Ramsay was aware of the inadequacy of Laodicea's water supply which left it vulnerable to military sabotage, but may have been unaware of its foul taste. Ramsay The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia, p. 415.

'jewishness'.[111] However, Hemer's own work has been severely criticised for its speculative nature and some of its tenuous textual allusions.[112]

Others have continued to bring new archaeological and literary discoveries about the culture and history of Asia Minor to bear on the text of the letters.[113] But such writers tend to be engaged at the same level of enquiry. They still understand the primary function and interpretation of the letters to be in historical and sociological realms rather than important to the narrative, theology or structure of Revelation. A connected problem with this approach, though not one so directly of concern to this thesis is highlighted by Friesen. "Rather than provide new insights into the material conditions of life in the Greco-Roman world, the realia remain isolated from each other, awaiting some connection with a biblical text."[114] The archaeology of south-western Asia Minor, with vast remains at Ephesus and Pergamum (even in Ramsay's day) and still next to nothing at Thyatira or Philadelphia, is very uneven. This also makes analysis of the letters by this 'archaeological' method inadequate in many ways.

Ramsay's emphasis and influence being what it was, other possible interpretive keys to the letters, such as Old Testament allusions and literary considerations, continued to play a much reduced part until the late 1970s. The break from Ramsay's agenda, and the rediscovery of the effect of the text will be dealt with in the section below on contemporary critical approaches.

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[111]Hemer, pp. 15-17 and 26.

[112]Friesen, pp. 301-306.

[113]E.g. M J Rudwick and E M Green, "The Laodicean Lukewarmness", Expository Times 69 (1957-58): 176-178; P Wood, "Local Knowledge in the Letters of the Apocalypse", Expository Times 73 (1961-62), pp. 71-78; J M Court, Myth and History in the Book of Revelation (London: SPCK, 1979), pp. 20-42.

[114]Friesen, p. 305.

## 4. Source and Form Criticism: R H Charles and His Influence

R H Charles (whose significant place in the history of the study of Revelation has already been noted, above p. 31) was not as interested in the letters as his contemporary Ramsay. Nor was he as dependent on the archaeological approach to the scientific study of Revelation. Rather, Charles was more concerned with textual and linguistic critical approaches. He applies this type of criticism to the septet of letters which are for him an integrated part of the whole work, at least generically speaking. In fact, pre-empting genre criticism by a few decades, he considers the letters to be in harmony with the book's literary form: "The whole book from 1:4 to its close is in fact an epistle."[115]

However, Charles' textual and linguistic approach led him to a particular view of the structure and dating of Revelation. This view edged the letters out of the main picture and caused Charles to portray them as a relatively unimportant part of the work. He believed that the evidence of the text demonstrated that John "wrote the letters at a date anterior to that of the Book as a whole, before the all-important conflict between the mutually exclusive claims of Christians and Caesarism came to be recognised".[116] Charles calculated that this redactional work had been carried out in the last decade of the first century. The religious and political situations of the churches had changed considerably between the time of the original construction of the letters and the recording of the visions that make up the bulk of Revelation. Because of this, in Charles' view, John had to make some adjustments to the old material that he wished to include.

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[115]Charles. ICC Commentary. Vol. I. p. 8.
[116]Ibid.. p. 37.

> (W)hen he put together all his visions, he re-edited these Letters. In re-editing these Letters he made certain changes in the beginnings of them which brought them more into harmony with i:13-18 (the vision of Christ), and inserted certain additions which adapted the Letters more or less to the expectations underlying the rest of the Book. It is not improbable that these Letters were actually sent in their original form to the Seven Churches.[117]

Charles further decreases the importance of the letters by saying that although they have a "vigorous epistolary style" they are not as good literature as the rest of Revelation which he considers "sublime".[118] This was, of course, the opposite of Ramsay's view (above p. 46.) Although the academic careers of Charles and Ramsay overlapped, Charles' appreciation of Jewish material and his repatriation of apocalyptic indicates that he had a more modern attitude to the text than did Ramsay. However, it was not so modern as to allow for much of a literary or rhetorical strategy to be found in the messages.

Charles' devaluation of the letters is not in any direct way a challenge to Ramsay. His treatment of the letters reveals quite a different set of concerns at work. The primary reason that he places them in a subordinate rôle to the rest of the book is that they do not make reference to the emperor cult.[119] Charles believes that because they make no reference to the persecution caused by Christian opposition to emperor worship they must have been written before it occurred. In Charles' view persecution by

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[117]Ibid. (My parentheses. his capitalisation.)

[118]Ibid., p. 43.

[119]In total contrast Schüssler Fiorenza sees conflict with the emperor cult informing the content and rhetoric of most of the letters. Revelation: Vision of a Just World. pp. 53-56.

Rome is the major theological and social issue in Revelation. Because of this the letters must be seen as tangential to the document. However, there are references to an anticipation or fear of Roman state persecution within the letters, such as Rev 2:10 and Rev 3:10 "the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth" which, in particular, Charles finds out of place. In order to maintain his view of a pre-persecution date for the composition of the letters Charles details the reasons why he believes that this verse, and other persecution references in the letters, are later additions to the text, written at a time when there was a great anticipation of persecution within the Christian community.[120]

It is important to note that the letters are not without function or significance in Charles' interpretive scheme. They provide valuable insights into the communities that Revelation addresses.[121] They also provide evidence that John was influenced by Paul.[122] However, the net result is that the letters are marginalized from the rest of Revelation. They are by the same author and were addressed to the same communities but they have little to do with the great themes and issues of Revelation proper. In the lengthy sections that Charles devotes to the theology of Revelation, and the method and purpose of the author,[123] there are hardly any references to Revelation 2-3.

Although Charles' redactional criticism of the letters has since been largely abandoned, the idea that the seven letters serve as not much more than historical and sociological scene setters has been a persistent one. Ramsay and Charles hold very

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[120]Charles. ICC Commentary. Vol. I. pp. 43-45.

[121]Ibid., p. 93. for instance.

[122]Ibid., pp. 93-95. The influence of Pauline epistolary form on the Apocalypse has been propounded more recently by M Karrer. Die Johannesoffenbarung als Brief: Studien zu ihrem literarischen. historischen und theologischen Ort. Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments. 140 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. 1986). pp. 73-75.

[123]Charles. ICC Commentary. Vol. I. pp. *cix-cxiv* and *cxv* ff.

different views as to the literary value of the letters and their position regarding the rest of the book. But, ironically and significantly, it is one of the results of both their works that the letters have frequently been dealt with, and written about, separately from the rest of the Apocalypse. Both Charles and Ramsay distract the interpreter/reader from the significant rhetorical purpose of the letters which will be emphasised in this study.

A few English language writers have taken the idea of the letters as separate constructs further, characterising Revelation as a composite piece of early Christian writing with the letters as one of the separate pieces. An example of this is the Anchor Bible Commentary on Revelation by Josephine Massyngberde Ford.[124] (On this work see below p. 170.) As well as being influenced by Charles, such writers would also have been influenced by German scholarship on Revelation where multi-document hypotheses were more popular (below p. 58). In this view Revelation was edited by a later Christian author with the letters being part of the 'christianising' material added to make Revelation more palatable to non-Jewish Christians readers.

## 5. Other Early Twentieth-Century English Language Scholarship

Following the era of Ramsay, Charles and Swete, English language Revelation studies went into something of a decline until well past mid-century.[125] It is likely, at least as far as the letters are concerned, that there appeared little left to do after Ramsay's seemingly exhaustive study. It may also be the case that they were so successful in consigning Revelation, and historicism, to the past that it seemed best to leave it there. However, work being done in other areas of New Testament studies

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[124]J M Ford, Revelation, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1975).

[125]In the analysis of Schüssler Fiorenza in a survey of Revelation studies, "Revelation", in E J Epp and G W MacRae (eds.), The New Testament and its Modern Interpreters (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), p. 407.

eventually filtered through and once literary and narrative criticism became fully in vogue, it was difficult to ignore the Apocalypse, it being the most poetic work in the New Testament.[126]

In the 1940s it was evident to Kiddle that a discussion of Revelation's literary character was needed in his introduction to the book.[127] Although Revelation can look like "an awkward grafting of previously separate sources", it proves "on closer study, to be an example of skilful, and even subtle combination of visions".[128] It would appear to be part of his agenda to counteract those who still hold that "the book is composed of disparate sources, badly patched together by an unskilful editor," and those who propose "unconvincing attempts to mutilate the text"[129]. However, Kiddle's understanding of Revelation as a single source document does not appear to include the first three chapters. Although he thinks that John wrote the letters, they do not make a contribution to his understanding of the Apocalypse's literary character or unity; nor is he overly taken with Ramsay's approach to the letters:

> Our chief concern, therefore, in approaching the seven letters must be not to reconstruct the *minutiæ* of local circumstances, but to appreciate the essential nature of the contribution made by each to John's sevenfold discourse.[130]

A contemporary work of quite a different character, but one that nevertheless had an impact even outside of the study of the Apocalypse, is Austin Farrer's A Rebirth

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[126]As is generally agreed, e.g. Schüssler Fiorenza, Revelation: Vision of a Just World, pp. 26-31; L L Thompson, p. 5. B McGinn, "Revelation", in R Alter and F Kermode (eds.), The Literary Guide to the Bible (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1987), p. 539.

[127]M Kiddle, The Revelation of St John, The Moffatt New Testament Commentary (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1940), pp. *xxvii-xxxiii*.

[128]Ibid., p. *xxvii*.

[129]Ibid., p. *xxxii*. (He does not name any proponents of this view.)

of Images.[131] This work holds that the motifs and images of Revelation's visions are drawn in the main from the religious festivals of Judaism. This idea had also been explored to some extent in Germany[132] in the 1930s. Farrer takes it further, finding in Revelation's form the influence of the first century Rabbinical festal lectionary.[133] Farrer is also concerned with Revelation's literary and theological relation to the Old and New Testaments.[134]

With John's grand festal scheme as a framework for the Apocalypse, Farrer is not likely to indulge in redaction criticism. Thus the letters are an integral part of Revelation. Farrer emphasises the correlation between the seven messages and the seven candlesticks of Rev 1:12-13, which in turn have a tenable connection with the temple services.[135] This link is stressed to the extent that Farrer regards the messages as being almost exclusively about light.[136] Thus Farrer emphasises the christological introduction of each letter but is less interested in the rest of its content. His agenda means that he hardly deals with the social world of the Asian churches or John's attempts to persuade his audience to repent. The pastoral or rhetorical rôle of the Seer is quite secondary to his prophetic and visionary activities.[137]

A Rebirth of Images now appears somewhat contrived, though its intricacy is to be admired and it would appear likely that John is influenced by the festal calendar in the

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[130]Ibid., p. 18. His italics.

[131]A Farrer, A Rebirth of Images: The Making of St John's Apocalypse (London: Dacre Press, 1949)

[132]For example, C Clemen, "Visionen und Bilder in der Offenbarung Johannes", Theologische Studien und Kritiken 107 (1936): 236-265.

[133]Farrer, pp. 7-9 and passim.

[134]Ibid., pp. 13-35.

[135]Ibid. pp. 37f. This is so much the case that in places he refers to the whole of Revelation 1-3 as "the candlestick vision", e.g. p. 75.

[136]Ibid., p. 60.

[137]Ibid., pp. 303-306

way Farrer suggests, to some extent at least. The letters do not make as large a contribution to the scheme as the other septets, even though, as Farrer himself points out, they make up a similar amount of Revelation's bulk.[138]

## 6. Early Twentieth-Century German Scholarship

The 'historicist' hermeneutical tradition of interpreting the letters, with which this thesis engages, was an English language event, taking place and attracting adherents almost exclusively in Britain and North America. For this reason the German study of the letters, or Revelation as a whole, has not been too deeply delved into. However, it is important for this study that the major critical approaches to the seven letters of twentieth-century German language writers be explored here. This will serve the purposes of comparison, balance and the analysis of the limited amount of cross fertilisation that has happened in the area with which this study is primarily concerned.

The early German view of the letters was that they were actual epistles sent by John to each separate community as an introduction and accompaniment to the visionary body of the text.[139] Not surprisingly German critics moved rapidly towards the idea of a multi-document origin of Revelation, as source and redaction criticism were extensively applied. These multi-document theories became quite elaborate. Weiss, for instance, develops a possible document history and hierarchy that includes "*die Apokalypse Q*".[140] This German multi-document view was disapproved of by the British academic establishment. Both Swete and Hort single it out as being unhelpful to the study and

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[138]Ibid., p. 45.

[139]F Spitta, Die Offenbarung des Johannes (Halle: Waisenhaus, 1889) in Feuillet, p. 37.

[140]J Weiss, Die Offenbarung des Johannes: Ein Beitrag zur Literatur- und Religionsgeschichte (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1904), pp. 147f.

exegesis of Revelation,[141] though Charles was probably more favourable to German scholarship generally. Wilhelm Bousset's[142] multi-document hypothesis was the most long lasting and influential, and certainly induced many scholars to view the letters as being in need of separate treatment if not separately authored.[143]

The extreme opposite of the early view of Spitta is put forward by Lohmeyer in his commentary Die Offenbarung des Johannes in which he proposes that the letters are purely fictional, with John having no intention of addressing the actual situation in the communities supposedly addressed. "*Die Schreiben in c. 2 und 3 sind alles andere als Briefe. Keine briefliche Form, keine briefliche Situation, kein brieflicher Austausch ist in ihnen zu finden.*"[144] In other words the "letters" of Revelation 2-3 are not letter-like at all and do not contain letter-like features.

Lohmeyer's commentary reveals that his primary concern is eschatology. The letters are not part of the eschatological framework of Revelation and are therefore of relative unimportance to Lohmeyer. Although he devotes a fair portion of his commentary to a detailed exegesis of the letters he ends the section by saying, "*Einheit und Vielfalt der Briefe in sich sowie ihre Einordnung in den Plan und Aufbau der Apc ergeben sich dann als notwendige Folge dieses Verhältnisses.*"[145] The letters inform the reader of what is to come and have their place in the overall scheme but they do not make a primary contribution to the eschatological theology or message which, in Lohmeyer's scheme, is the vital function of the book.

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[141]F J A Hort, The Apocalypse of St. John I-III (London: MacMillian, 1908), p. *xiii*, and Swete, p. *lii*.

[142]W Bousset, Die Offenbarung des Johannes, Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament, 16, Sixth Edition (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1906), pp. 128f.

[143]U Schnelle, The History and Theology of the New Testament Writers (London: SCM Press, 1998), pp. 530-531.

[144]Lohmeyer, p. 39.

The eschatological view of Revelation as a whole continued to be popular in Germany into the late 1930s and 1940s as observed in works like Sickenberger's Erklärung der Johannesapokalypse[146] which sets out to demonstrate that Revelation has no connection with John's time or subsequent history. Zahn's Die Offenbarung des Johannes[147] is another work that focuses on *Endgeschichte* and contains certain aspects of millenarian hermeneutics in its eschatology. There was, however, an increasing move in German work on Revelation[148] towards a purely historical-critical methodology which had been the main approach taken by French scholars for some time.[149]

Modern German scholarship on Revelation would appear to favour the full integration of the letters into the whole work. What is more, its theology and construction are also viewed as essentially unified. "Revelation should be seen as a uniform, consistently-constructed work, that from beginning to end reflects the theological intentions of its author."[150] The most substantial recent German work to examine the letters and their function in the Apocalypse is Martin Karrer's Die Johannesoffenbarung als Brief. Karrer's contribution to the understanding of the seven messages has been utilised below (see for instance p. 178).

## 7. Summary

Much more could be said concerning scholarship and research on Revelation and the seven letters in the early twentieth century. However, a survey of such research

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[145]Ibid., p. 41.

[146]J Sickenberger, Erklärung der Johannesapokalypse (Bonn, 1939).

[147]Th Zahn, Die Offenbarung des Johannes, Kommentar zum Neuen Testament, 18 (Leipzig: Deichertsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1926).

[148]For instance, J Behm, Die Offenbarung des Johannes (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1935) and E Lohse, Die Offenbarung des Johannes, Das Neuen Testament Deutsch, Band II (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1960).

[149]Feuillet, pp. 16-20.

is not the function of the section above. Rather its purpose is to demonstrate the way the letters were studied; how the use of archaeological data, linguistic and redactional speculation marginalised them; and how any perception of the rhetorical strategy that the author has used to persuade his readers to repent was obscured. Likewise the abandonment of historicism meant that the letters were less applied by interpretive communities and that their history of influence was, in a manner of speaking, interrupted.

## C. Modern Critical Approaches

A more creative period of interpretation and analysis has been ushered in to Revelation studies by modern, primarily linguistic approaches to the text. These have allowed for the role of the reader to be emphasised and the literary power and strategies of the text to be observed. The *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the text is also emerging as a legitimate analytical tool. However, other contemporary (and necessary) approaches, such as sociological analysis, maintain a focus on the original setting of the text.

### 1. Social World

The investigation of the social world of first and early second century Asia Minor is an area of New Testament studies that has proved to be both popular and fruitful in the last two decades. The Christian communities that were established in Asia Minor were amongst the earliest outside of Palestine. The New Testament reveals a certain amount of information concerning them in a variety of places, including Acts, the Pauline corpus and, of course, Revelation itself.

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[150]J Roloff, The Revelation of John, Continental Commentaries (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), p. 13.

In the most extensive sociological study of Revelation, L L Thompson recognises that the symbolic imagery and bizarre language of Revelation might not be the first place that the sociologist would look for insights into urban life in first-century Asia. However, the opening evidence of the book reveals that John, "has a message for Christians who are living in that urban society, specifically in the towns of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea."[151] In particular Thompson focuses on the Christian and Jewish communities in Asia using the material in the letters as a prime source. He develops the hypothesis that most late first-century Christians and Jews were sociologically well integrated into Graeco-Roman culture.[152]

Another Revelation scholar to develop an interest in the sociological aspects of Revelation is David Aune. His article "The Social Matrix of the Apocalypse of John"[153] is a good example of the way sociological information can be extracted from the book. Pilch on the other hand uses the linguistics of Revelation 2-3 to explore an aspect of the social anthropology behind the author/hearer dynamic that gave rise to the Apocalypse.[154] Friesen argues for attempts to be made to locate Revelation in its first-century social setting by careful and comprehensive use of the archaeological evidence from the seven cities[155]. This is to be expected as most of the other locations in the book are hardly accessible to the spade, being somewhat otherworldly. Räpple has looked at the concept of 'city' in Revelation, both its spiritual and symbolic meaning as well as

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[151]L L Thompson, p. 5

[152]Ibid., pp. 116f.

[153]D E Aune, "The Social Matrix of the Apocalypse of John", Biblical Research 26 (1981): 16-32.

[154]J J Pilch, "Lying and Deceit in the Letters to the Seven Churches: Perspectives from Cultural Anthropology", Biblical Theological Bulletin 22 (1992): 130-135.

[155]Friesen, pp. 291-314.

what can be learnt about city life in Asia Minor from the text of the letters.[156] Exploring the correlations between non-canonical early Christian literature and the letters has shed some light on elements of early Christian social history.[157] Kraybill builds his case for emperor Worship being the primary background to Revelation by surveying the archaeology and economy of the imperial temples in the seven cities.[158]

The letters play a large part in these studies and others on the sociology of Revelation. This is due to what the seven messages reveal or imply about the socio-religious dynamic within the specific communities and the relationship between church and prophet/pastor. What most sociological studies have concluded is that the letters reflect a situation of compromise and complacency with little external persecution. Any crisis is more likely to be one that John perceived, or even sought for with those he deemed complacent to the point of heresy. (On this issue, and what it is that John wishes his hearers/readers to repent from, see the next chapter, especially pp. 148f.)

This view of the social world of the letters has been challenged. Scobie considers there to be insufficient sociological data in the letters to develop any helpful understanding of the broader social context.[159] Slater on the other hand argues that the letters, and other parts of Revelation, reveal that the Christians of Asia Minor suffered sporadic but intimidating harassment and discrimination at the hands of local pagans. Slater's main argument is that, "a careful examination of the letters of Rev 2-3

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[156]E M Räpple. "The City in Revelation". Bible Today 34 (1996): 359-365.

[157]C Trevett. "The Other Letters to the Churches of Asia: Apocalypse and Ignatius of Antioch". Journal for the Study of the New Testament 37 (1989): 117-135.

[158]J N Kraybill. Imperial Cult and Commerce in John's Apocalypse. Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series. 132 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press. 1996). pp. 60f.

[159]Scobie. "Local References in the Letters". pp. 611-620.

demonstrates that the only external factors discussed in them refer to the suffering of Christians."[160]

The letters also shed light on the study of the polemic between Jews and Christians in the late first and early second centuries, and not just in the work of Revelation specialists. Borgen points out that Jews are mentioned only in the letters, and that these references are positive, in their way, indicating an admiration for communities that are true to the law.[161] What is more the underlying conflicts in early Christianity about pagan compromise and 'Judaizing' are what set the agenda for the whole of Revelation. This indicates that John is engaging with a problem common to most early Christians. Borgen also holds that these references shed some light on sociological problems occurring within contemporary Judaism.[162]

## 2. Literary Criticism

Modern scholarship, research and exegesis on the book of Revelation acknowledges that literary approaches and critical tools are vital.[163] These approaches almost always view the text as having a literary and authorial integrity, and therefore have to address the matter of the letters with some vigour. This is because, on the surface at least, the letters do stand out in terms of genre, style and function. This is not difficult to demonstrate, as is seen in the work of some of those already considered. The high concentration of apocalyptic imagery, other worldly experiences and fantastical

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[160]T Slater. "On the Social Setting of the Revelation to John". New Testament Studies 44 (1998). p. 254.

[161]P Borgen. Early Christianity and Hellenistic Judaism (Edinburgh: T & T Clark. 1996). pp. 273f.

[162]Ibid.. p. 281.

[163]L L Thompson. p. 539f.

locations to be found in Revelation 1 and Revelation 4-21 seem at first reading to be opaque to the modern western reader.

Of course the letters also contain considerable amounts of oblique, esoteric and even apocalyptic imagery. But the work of Ramsay and his followers has helped to unpack that imagery and the previously obscure historical reference in the letters. This, combined with the accessible geographical locations of the cities of Revelation 2-3, has made the letters appear generically akin to other, more accessible, New Testament literature. If there is a section of Revelation that stands apart from the rest, giving the contemporary reader something to relate to, then this is it. Hemer is right, generally speaking, that the letters are "the easiest lock in an admittedly difficult text."[164]

One of the major principles of literary biblical criticism is that, as far as possible, it is the final form of the text that should be considered.[165] So those writers who apply literary critical tools to the analysis of Revelation need to address the challenge of integrating the seven letters into the rest of the document. This integration needs to be shown on linguistic, structural, symbolic, authorial, generic and narrative levels. With Revelation 2-3's natural propensity to stand out from the rest of the book and the work done by Ramsay and Charles, this has proved to be both challenging and rewarding.

Literary criticism has taken various forms and the letters have attracted particular attention from genre criticism and to some extent rhetorical criticism which will now be explored in more detail. (Narrative Criticism is yet another aspect of Literary Criticism. Definitions of the basic terms of Narrative Criticism and its application to Rev 3:14-22 is dealt with in Chapter Three below, pp. 191-194.)

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[164]Hemer, p. 1.

## 3. Genre Criticism

The study of Revelation's genre was of particular interest to a number of scholars from the late seventies to the early nineties. In some of these studies the letters hardly featured at all[166]. This is often true of those wanting to demonstrate that Revelation is generically very close to Jewish apocalyptic literature. There is some overlap here with the argument that Revelation was an essentially Jewish document that underwent Christian redaction at a later period. But for some who have undertaken genre analysis of Revelation the letters are of importance to the entire work due to the way they signal its function or purpose. Karrer, for instance, has propounded the need to understand the whole of Revelation in the light of its epistolary nature.[167] Rollof modifies that view of Revelation's genre thus:

> Revelation is a prophetic writing that contains numerous apocalyptic motifs and elements of style, but whose form is chiefly characterised by the purpose of epistolary communication.[168]

There is a good case that the seven letters of Revelation 2-3 help to demonstrate that the Apocalypse falls into the genre of prophecy. In part this is because "the author insists that his writing should be understood as an 'ecumenical letter' not as a secret document".[169] Hence the seven messages take on a prophetic form and show John's purpose in that, "he spoke to warn, judge, appeal (for repentance) and to

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[165]This point is generally accepted for literary, sociological and rhetorical approaches to the text. See above p. 29 and the discussion of the problem in Watson, pp. 15ff.

[166]E.g. J L Bailey, "Genre Analysis", in J B Green (ed.), Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1995): 197-221. Bailey believes Revelation includes a number genres, p. 210, but his actual genre criticism focuses only on 'apocalyptic' passages, pp. 217-220.

[167]Karrer, *passim*, but see particularly pp. 22-39. Aune, Revelation 1-5, p. *lxxiii* considers his approach to be unsuccessful.

[168]Roloff, p. 8.

encourage."[170] "The letters of chapters 2 and 3 of Revelation are embedded in what is prophetic proclamation from beginning to end."[171]

For Mazzaferri the Apocalypse strongly conforms to the genre of prophecy. The core of his thesis is that, "Revelation lacks far too many of the essential features of apocalyptic contents to have any rightful place whatever in the genre."[172] Revelation's conditionalism is one of the theological features which helps to establish this generic identification. For Mazzaferri the repentance elements of the letters make a significant contribution to this "un-apocalyptic" aspect of Revelation.[173] Many factors, including the opportunities that are given in Revelation 2-3 for repentance and reformation, reveal that John writes "like a genuine prophet, his message is conditional, not deterministic."[174]

The seven messages have also been critically compared with secular letters of the period. Stauffer finds a close literary relationship between the 'letters' of Revelation 2-3, the edicts of Domitian and the edicts of the great rulers of Asia.[175] However, splitting the messages off generically and looking at them in the light of contemporary secular letters was done by Ramsay himself and proved unsatisfactory. "The Seven Letters are farther removed from the type of 'true letter' than any other compositions in the New Testament."[176] Yet he does perceive John making a specific generic, literary choice in his writing. "In their conception they are strictly 'literary epistles,' deliberate

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[169]D Hill, New Testament Prophecy (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1979), p. 73.
[170]Ibid., p. 84.
[171]Ibid., 220, note 19.
[172]F D Mazzaferri, The Genre of the Book of Revelation from a Source Critical Perspective, Beiheft zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft, 54 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1989), p. 250.
[173]Ibid., pp. 240-247.
[174]Ibid., p. 250.
[175]E Stauffer, Christ and the Caesars (London: SCM Press, 1955), pp. 175-191.
[176]Ramsay, Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia, p. 38. See also pp. 15-22, and 50-56.

and intentional imitations of a literary form that was already firmly established in Christian usage."[177] As shown above (see p. 46) Ramsay preferred John to use this 'genre' as opposed to apocalyptic, which he believed was an inferior and unsuitable style.

When the matter of literary genre is considered the seven messages have indeed presented critics with a challenge. This is particularly true if one deems them to be generically like real letters in any way. The essence of genre criticism is to assess a work in the light of other works of the same literary type. Hence "if we say that a work is apocalyptic we encourage the reader to expect that it frames its message within the view of the world that is characteristic of the genre."[178] If the seven 'letters' are separated then they can be assessed in the light of other letters, from Christian, Graeco-Roman and Jewish settings, for example. The rest of Revelation can then be assessed in the light of apocalyptic literature or prophecy or whatever its genre is considered to be. However, one of the reasons that genre criticism of Revelation has been fraught with difficulties is that literary criticism generally wants to view a text in its final form. Revelation's final form includes chapter two and chapter three. Recent studies of the over-all structure of Revelation have convincingly demonstrated that it is likely that the canonical text of Revelation is very close to how it was originally written by the Seer.[179] The essential tool of genre criticism, the assessing of a text by comparison with others of the same genre, becomes extremely difficult to use if the piece of literature in question switches genres part way through. Few, if any, other pieces of literature can be found that switch genres in the same way.

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[177] Ibid.
[178] J J Collins, The Apocalyptic Imagination (New York: Crossroads Publishing, 1984), p. 7.

David Aune stresses that "*the seven proclamations constitute a mixed genre created by the author.*"[180] The mixture in question being that of the "royal or imperial edict" and "the prophetic speech form that may be designated the parenetic salvation-judgement oracle."[181] Aune's view is that John has blended genre's rather than chopped from one to another within the seven proclamations. There is also no doubt that John intended Revelation to operate generically and rhetorically as a whole. However, this still makes comparative genre analysis limited. Aune has discussed the genre question of the messages and the whole work further in his monumental commentary on Revelation.[182]

So the shift in appreciation of the function and integration of the messages to the churches between Charles (above p. 53) and Aune is considerable:

> There is now widespread agreement that the seven proclamations never existed independently of Revelation, but were designed specifically for their present literary setting by the author-editor at a final stage in the composition of the entire work. Despite their ostensible destinations they were clearly intended to complement one another and to be read and heeded by the other congregations.[183]

In terms of genre, Revelation is now usually seen as a pastoral letter, written by a Christian prophet who chose to write using apocalyptic language and imagery under the influence of the Hebrew Bible. Whatever his choice or blend of genre it is agreed that it is his choice, and that he makes it so as to be a more effective communicator of

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[179]G K Barr, "The Structure of Revelation", Irish Biblical Studies 19 (1997): 121-132.

[180]Aune, Revelation 1-5, p. 119. (His emphasis.)

[181]Ibid. See also D E Aune, "The Form and Function of the Proclamations to the Seven Churches", New Testament Studies 36 (1990): 182-204.

[182]Aune, Revelation 1-5, pp. *lxx-xc*.

his message – a message designed to influence those who read it. The implications of the prophetic aspects of Revelation's genre, particularly with regard to its rhetorical impact on its readers, will be discussed further in Chapter Three below (see pp. 162-163).

## 4. Rhetorical Criticism

A more fruitful line of literary critical enquiry, in terms of rediscovering the persuasive effects of the text, has been Rhetorical Criticism and associated approaches, where a much broader type of literature is considered and opened for constructive comparison. Rhetorical literature is that in which the author attempts to persuade his audience to act or think in a way that he wishes them to do. The Book of Revelation certainly contains this type of literature, and as the rediscovery of the rhetoric of the letters forms a major focus of this thesis, it is necessary to explore the background to this literary critical approach before going further.

### a. Aristotelian Principles and Definitions

As defined by Aristotle, rhetoric is that branch of discourse which is concerned with persuasion. The definitions of Aristotelian rhetoric still underpin contemporary rhetorical criticism of the New Testament. Writers like Kennedy and Schüssler Fiorenza outline them at an early stage in their material.[184]

Rhetoric can be both written and oral; however, the oral form is usually primary. When it is written it acts as a substitute for oral discourse. Persuasive discourse may be categorised into three basic 'types'. These are: 'forensic or judicial oratory', courtroom oratory intended to prove the justice or injustice of a past action;

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[183]Aune, "Form and Function", pp. 183-184.

[184]G A Kennedy, New Testament Interpretation Through Rhetorical Criticism (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Caroline Press, 1984), pp. 13f, and Schüssler Fiorenza, Revelation: Vision of a Just World, pp. 20f.

'deliberative rhetoric', oratory of the public forum intended to move the audience to, or restrain them from, an action central to the speaker's concern; and 'epideictic oratory', rhetoric that accompanies public ceremonies. The intention of epideictic oratory is to display sentiments appropriate for such occasions as funerals, inaugurations, and dedications. In addition to these 'types' of persuasion, Aristotle also identifies three 'means' of persuasion. They are, the appeal to reason, also known as 'logos'; the appeal to emotion, also known as 'pathos'; and the appeal of/to the speaker's/subject's character, also known as 'ethos'.

The actual process of rhetorical communication, from conception to delivery, is divided by theorists into five 'parts'. These are, 'invention', which is finding arguments and other material for the speech; 'arrangement', which is organising the material of the speech; 'style', which is putting the arguments into effective words; 'memory', which is the technique for memorising the speech for oral presentation; and 'delivery', which is the technique for managing voice and gesture in the act of presenting the speech. The last two 'parts' pertain particularly to oral rhetoric and are not usually of relevance to the rhetorical criticism and analysis of written material. However, it is possible that an author may consider these aspects if it is intended that the work is to be delivered orally, or heard in a particular way. There is evidence of this in Revelation, e.g. "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Rev 3:22).

b. <u>New Testament Rhetorical Criticism</u>

George Kennedy is the seminal figure in the relatively new discipline of biblical Rhetorical Criticism. Kennedy has considerable confidence in what can be achieved by this approach and finds uses for it in many areas of biblical research. He defines the pragmatic rhetoric of biblical literature in less rigid terms than the classical scheme

outlined above, stating that "rhetoric is that quality in discourse by which a speaker or writer seeks to accomplish his purpose."[185]

Building on some of the work done by Northrop Frye in The Great Code,[186] Kennedy finds a high degree of linkage between New Testament rhetoric and *kerygma*. He cites the example of Peter's speech in Acts 10:34-43 as an example of kerygmatic preaching used by Luke to rhetorical effect. In this respect much of the New Testament needs to be classified as "radical Christian rhetoric"[187] as opposed to the more formal, studied rhetoric of trained Greek orators. Nevertheless 'Ethos' (the authority claims of New Testament authors), 'Pathos' (the threats and promises of apocalyptic), and 'Logos' (Pauline argumentation), are all to be found in the New Testament, as are the 'kinds' and the non-oral 'parts' of rhetoric as defined originally by Aristotle.[188] Kennedy makes a good case that even the very order of the books of the New Testament canon is consistent with the rhetorical conventions of the Graeco-Roman world.[189] Thus - the Gospels proclaim the core message; Acts of the Apostles describes the reception of that message, and its life changing effects on the recipients; the Epistles argue its interpretation; and finally Revelation combines all of these into a dramatic epilogue.

The function of rhetorical analysis for those studying any significant text is to assist in the "discovery of the author's intent and of how that is transmitted through a text to an audience."[190] This is because it concentrates on the author's intent to persuade and it attempts to discover the devices he or she uses to achieve that intent. These devices in the text will follow the basic rules of the ancient rhetorical orators but will

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[185]Kennedy, p. 3.
[186]N Frye, The Great Code: the Bible and Literature (London: Routledge, 1982).
[187]Kennedy, p. 7.
[188]Ibid., pp. 14-20.
[189]Ibid., p. 97.

vary depending on the local situation. New Testament rhetorical criticism has to accommodate the added dynamics of religious conviction and the concept of 'scripture'. This then helps to show that the New Testament's *kerygma* was "designed to construe the Christian experience, to express its power and to persuade others of the truth."[191]

Kennedy thinks that the Bible is an especially productive area for rhetorical criticism because of a number of key factors. These are:

i. The oral and linear relationship the Bible has with its audience.[192]

ii. The strength of belief and commitment of the biblical authors.

iii. The creative reworking of Old Testament material.[193]

iv. The strength of the authors' emotions and their belief that they are changing the world.[194]

v. The authority claims of the writers and the challenge to them by Rome, the Jews and the heterodox within the church.[195]

These factors cause virtually all the aspects of classical rhetorical techniques to be used at some point or other in the New Testament.

Rhetorical criticism of a New Testament passage looks for an overriding rhetorical problem that has created the need for the document. This is followed by an analysis of the rhetorical situation between audience and author because the situation will shape and control the response. Using the Aristotelian categories the critic is able to detect the persuasive effects of the parts and the whole and make judgements concerning

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[190]Ibid., p. 12.

[191]C C Black, "Rhetorical Criticism", in J B Green (ed.), Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation, p. 276.

[192]Kennedy, p. 5.

[193]Ibid., p. 26.

[194]Ibid., pp. 91f and 140f.

[195]Ibid., pp. 17, 40-44 and 119.

the effectiveness of the arrangement of the material. Hence a number of literary factors help to define the rhetorical power of a text. These include threat and promise motivators; the use of genre and style for dramatic or literary effect; the use of presuppositions shared between author and audience, and the utilisation of external proofs. Kennedy identifies three types of these external proofs at use in the New Testament, namely: quotations from the Hebrew Scriptures; physical evidence, e.g. miracles and signs; and personal witness, such as the Baptist.[196]

I also contend, and the evidence offered in the chapters below will help demonstrate, that in some cases these rhetorical factors can assist in the understanding of the way a text is received by its readers/hearers. This, however, is beyond where Kennedy's interests lie.

c. Rhetorical Criticism and the Apocalypse of John

Kennedy's main interest is the rhetorical structure of the Gospels and he does not turn his attention to the Apocalypse specifically. Its application to Revelation is therefore fairly recent, but a number of scholars have looked at Revelation both as a whole and at several of its parts from a Rhetorical Critical perspective with interesting results.[197] The best known of these is probably Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza whose work on rhetoric and the Apocalypse[198] will be explored below in some detail.

The seven messages are natural material for the rhetorical critic because a primary consideration of the discipline is the definition and analysis of the 'rhetorical situation'. The rhetorical situation is essentially the relationship between writer and

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[196]Kennedy, pp. 13-14.

[197]Kirby, pp. 197-207; S D O'Leary, Arguing the Apocalypse: A Theory of Millennial Rhetoric (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 4f.

[198]Schüssler Fiorenza, Revelation: Vision of a Just World, *passim*.

audience, and the forces that gave rise to the communication between them. The approaches to the letters taken by Ramsay and Charles essentially obscured the rhetorical content and persuasive power of the letters, although Ramsay's approach does at least imply that John was using local allusions to make his work more effective in some way.

In Revelation the messages are the primary source material for discovering what this rhetorical situation might have been. They are also highly influential in shaping the rhetorical relationship between the Apocalypse and later interpretive communities, as will be shown in Chapters Four and Five below. The rhetorical situation is complicated by the narrative hierarchy here. Thus, multiple audiences are addressed by God (Rev 1:1); who speaks through Christ (1:1) assisted by his angel (1:1); to John, who in turn testifies to what he hears (1:2) and records it (1:11). John is also addressed by Christ from another location - amidst the candlesticks, (Rev 1:12-13). He is then tasked with delivering a written account (Rev 1:19) of what he has seen to an 'angel' at each church (2:1 etc.). A mutli-faceted, multi-dimensional communication phenomenon is evidently underway at the beginning of Revelation and there is the potential for confusion or for the reader to become detached. But the specifically designated messages of Revelation 2-3 would have helped to draw the first reader back into the narrative.

d. Schüssler Fiorenza's Rhetorical Appraisal of Revelation

In Revelation: Vision of a Just World Schüssler Fiorenza give notice of her agenda by stating early on that she uses rhetorical analysis primarily "to analyze how biblical texts and interpretations participate in creating or sustaining oppressive or

liberation theo-ethical values and socio-political practices."[199] Thus as well as attempting to discover and analyse the persuasive effects hoped for by the author, rhetorical criticism can provide an understanding of the way the reader, or interpretive community, uses the text in particular social and political settings. In other words:

> Questions such as how meaning is constructed, whose interests are served, what kind of worlds are envisioned, what roles, duties, and values are advocated, which social-political practices are legitimated, or which communities of discourse are considered responsible become questions central to the interpretive task.[200]

To approach a biblical book in this fashion can mean that many elements are productively reappraised, and that looking at reading strategies of different interpretive communities can bring such research into a creative relationship with its *Wirkungsgeschichte*. Thus, specific to Revelation, the author's choice of literary genre, say apocalyptic, should no longer be thought of as a theological indicator. Rather, such a choice should be seen as an indicator of the author's rhetorical method or strategy.[201]

The seven letters of Revelation 2-3 play a major part the rhetorical strategy that Schüssler Fiorenza ascribes to John, and thus they "must be understood as an integral part of the author's overall visionary rhetorical composition."[202] The septet functions not so much as letters as prophetic proclamations with the rhetorical function of placing the readers in a subjugated rôle to the ultimate author of the letters - Christ - and delivering oracles designed to elicit sanctified action. In the Apocalypse, John is doing something

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[199]Ibid., p. 3
[200]Ibid.
[201]Ibid., pp. 23-26.
[202]Ibid., p. 47, See also pp. 45-57.

that is highly significant for his literary and prophetic tradition for "in shaping his own prophetic rhetoric in the literary form of an open letter, he engages in a creative remoulding of the prophetic tradition and authority."[203]

Schüssler Fiorenza suggests a standard rhetorical pattern for the letters, which serves to characterise the rhetorical setting of the entire book. It also demonstrates how radically different John's world-view is to that of the compromisers or liberals in the churches, as characterised by Balaam and Jezebel, for instance. It is John's purpose in the letters to persuade his readers to resist, or turn from, compromise with Rome and to prepare them for persecution to come.[204]

Schüssler Fiorenza is somewhat dismissive of the view that John might be attempting to communicate esoteric knowledge or predict future events (long or short term).[205] It is true that, as she states, he is more interested in exhortation and persuasion. But John's work, unlike that of most modern authors and analysts, is capable of operating on more than one level and Schüssler Fiorenza's dismissal of John's esoteric agenda is perhaps a result of her own reading strategy. With that slight criticism aside her work is of considerable interest and insight. What is more it demonstrates the legitimacy of connecting rhetorical analysis with *Wirkungsgeschichte* and calls to repentance. This thesis seeks to enlarge on that concept generally and will develop some of Schüssler Fiorenza's ideas about rhetoric in Chapter Two below.

In Vision of a Just World and elsewhere Schüssler Fiorenza has done much to rehabilitate the letters into Revelation as a whole. This is to such an extent that it is now legitimate to highlight the letters as the most significant indicators of the work's

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[203]Ibid., p. 50.
[204]Ibid., pp. 53-57.

theological, political and sociological agenda.[206] They can now be taken not so much as the preface or appendix of Revelation, but truly as its agenda-setting introduction.

e. Rhetorical Plot Function of the Letters

Rowland also holds that Revelation 1-3 outlines the essential message that John wishes to make known to his community and that the apocalyptic visions which follow are like an added illustration which, "intensifies the words of warning and encouragement which are contained in the letters." Thus the apocalyptic material of Revelation "functions within the framework of the spiritual needs of the community addressed."[207]

A Y Collins has integrated the rhetorical function of the letters into the overall structure of Revelation. Each of the book's sections; i.e. seven messages, seven seals, seven trumpets, seven visions, seven bowls and seven visions, moves from persecution, to punishment of the wicked, to salvation of the faithful. This, according to Collins, is the basic plot of all ancient myths of combat.[208]

## D. Conclusion

Ramsay's emphasis on local allusions helped the letters become the most accessible part of the book but also effectively severed their contact with the 'apocalyptic' parts. Charles' emphasis on the persecution conflict theme in Revelation meant that the letters were little more than a hastily added preface. In broad terms, those who followed Ramsay jumped straight to the letters, ignoring the rest and those who

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[205]Ibid., p. 47.
[206]See Schüssler Fiorenza, "Revelation", in Epp and MacRae, pp. 418-419.
[207]C Rowland, The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity (London: SPCK, 1982), p. 415.

followed Charles moved quickly from Revelation 1 on to Revelation 4, down-playing the letters. Effectively both scholars detach the letters from the body of the book and lose sight of the persuasive strategy of the letters.

Early German work on Revelation was dominated by a Jewish and Christian multi-document hypothesis with a late Christian redactor. The letters were usually considered to be a late Christian addition. Theologically the letters were believed to figure little in the eschatological theme which German commentators felt dominated Revelation. Multi-document theories are now quite rare for Revelation.

Popular commentaries on the Apocalypse have tended to concentrate on drawing out devotional applications from the letters. They have also explored the range of church based problems and situations that are evident in the letters and have drawn parallels with situations in today's Christian communities. Reiteration of Ramsay's best points are also common in commentaries.

Literary criticism has brought the letters back into the body of Revelation. They are no longer explored for their historical or archaeological value alone. Their social, rhetorical and narrative content are judged to be integral to understanding the whole of Revelation. Historicism, though in many respects an artificial hermeneutical scheme, brought some focus on the influence of the text. This, as will be shown, is particularly the case when applied to the repentance calls by readers who understand that the text is specifically addressing their time. Likewise a consideration of the reader in approaches like rhetorical criticism focuses attention on the reception and influence of the text.

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[208]A Y Collins, Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), pp. 149f. See also A-M Enroth, "The Hearing Formula in the Book of Revelation", New Testament Studies 36 (1990): 598-608.

By analysing the letters' repentance motif strategy and its *Wirkungsgeschichte* it is possible to detect a stream of influence from the Hebrew prophets and early Christian preaching, into and within Revelation, and on, to Christian interpretive communities. The theology and strategy of the repentance calls of Revelation will now be examined.

# Chapter Two

## Repentance and Conversion in Revelation

### A. Introduction

On the surface it may appear that Revelation does not contain a great deal of paranetic material, that is, material designed to encourage readers to improve themselves morally, ethically and spiritually. Although calls to repentance feature heavily in the messages to the seven churches, after the beginning of chapter four (the point where some consider 'Revelation proper' to begin,[1]) the book might appear to be almost silent on the possibility of character change.

The preceding analysis of scholarly work on Revelation 2-3 showed that some writers have recognised that the literary style or genre of the various parts of Revelation should not cause it to be read or studied in a fragmented way. This development tended to be driven by those researching the letters but it is now probably a majority view. For instance Hemer states, "they (the messages) appear quite distinct from the rest of the body of the Apocalypse, but prove on analysis to be intimately linked with it."[2]

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[1]E.g. G R Beasley-Murray, The Book of Revelation, New Century Bible (London: Oliphants, 1978), p. 108; Ford, Revelation, pp. 3-4; G A Krodel, Revelation, Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1989), p. 55.

[2]Hemer, p. 14, (my parentheses). See also his comments on pp. 16-17.

However it is possible to go even further than this. There is a strong case for claiming that the seven messages set the primary authorial intentions and agenda of Revelation. Thus Thompson is right to point out that:

> The importance of the epistolary elements in the Book of Revelation cannot be overemphasized. John not only addresses his vision to seven churches in Asia (Rev 1:4), but he also concludes his work with a closing grace (22:21). Further, his first vision involves the messages to the seven churches. Because of that placement, the conversations with the churches are not only given first position sequentially, but also the "messages" to the churches become the initial context – the base line – for images, symbols, and motifs used later in the transcendent visions.[3]

Taking this idea a step further, it could be claimed that one of John's reasons for writing, and maybe the most important one, is the chastening and spiritual reviving of the members of the Christian churches in Asia Minor. These authorial aims are stated in the letters, in relatively straight-forward language. Then the apocalyptic, graphical sections act as reinforcing illustrations, rhetorically designed to effectuate and illustrate the primary authorial intent in the lives of the readers.[4] These desired effects may be many, but undoubtedly one of the most prominent is the chastising and calling to repentance of those in his community who have lapsed into Roman/pagan (or perhaps Pauline[5]) practices. In other words Revelation is deliberately designed to persuade its readers to repent through literary devices, apocalyptic imagery, text-rhetorical

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[3]L L Thompson, p. 180.

[4]This observation is made in general terms by Rowland in The Open Heaven, p. 415.

[5]See the section entitled "4. Enemies Within and Without: Paul or Rome?", below, pp. 154f for a discussion of the possibility of an anti-Pauline agenda.

engendered emotions (including, but not limited to fear), and a series of more direct threats and promises.

Thompson goes on to describe the essential dynamic of this rhetorical strategy thus:

> Later usages loop back recursively to the messages given to the seven churches, in which Jesus describes the churches' situations, accuses, warns, and admonishes them, and promises good things to those who persevere in the faith.[6]

Although Thompson gives a brief example of how this might work in Revelation he does not take the idea much further. But there is a great deal to be discovered about John's rhetorical and parenetic intent by exploring this feature of the book in more depth. In order to help demonstrate this phenomenon, this chapter will undertake an analysis of the theme of repentance in the book of Revelation and explore the complex intertextuality of repentance-related imagery and language between the letters and the rest of the Apocalypse.

A definitive theology of repentance in Revelation has not been written, nor have many of those who have written on the book from a thematic perspective, or verse by verse commentators, dedicated many sections or pages to it. The exception to this is found in Richard Bauckham's The Climax of Prophecy, where a substantial chapter, entitled "The Conversion of the Nations", gets to grips with the subject from a particular

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[6]L L Thompson, p. 180.

perspective.[7] Bauckham's concepts and conclusions will be substantially engaged in this chapter.

The verb *μετανοεῖν* occurs only twelve times in Revelation, with a primary concentration of eight occurrences in Revelation 2-3 and only four in the following nineteen chapters. (A full list and translation of the texts containing *μετανοεῖν* are included in Appendix A, below p. 327). The noun *μετάνοια* does not occur in the Apocalypse at all. The primary word for change of heart used in the Septuagint is *ἐπιστρέφειν*. It is also used occasionally in the New Testament to mean conversion, as in Acts 9:35. However, *ἐπιστρέφειν* occurs only once in Revelation where it refers to John physically turning around to face the loud voice that surprises him (Rev 1:12). The linguistic core of this chapter will therefore be *μετανοεῖν*.

The way in which repentance is utilised structurally in the letters, and then linked via *Leitmotifs* throughout the rest of the material, will also be focused on in this chapter. In addition, reference will be made to the few places, such as Rev 11:13, where a number of authors believe there to be calls to repentance or even acts of repentance without the use of specific repentance terminology. However, priority will be given to the exegesis of the *μετανοεῖν* passages. As well as this basic exegesis and theological analysis, the views of major commentators will be examined. The related theological issues of determinism and free will, universalism and mission, which many scholars deem to have been significant, will also be explored.

An issue central to the theology of repentance in Revelation is the question of to whom the call to repentance, and thus the offer of redemption/salvation, is extended by

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[7] R Bauckham, The Climax of Prophecy (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), specifically pp. 238-337.

the text. Is it made just to those in the community, that is the Christians of John's flock? It is possible for instance to find a kind of determinism in places like Rev 18:4 "Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues." Or is the call truly universal? This might appear to be the case from a reading of Rev 3:20 "I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to be with them and eat with them[8], and they will eat with me." These questions have a bearing upon the soteriology of Revelation and the functional relationship between the messages to the seven churches and the rest of the work, as will be shown below. However, there is no clear agreement on this issue amongst Revelation scholars. Some find little chance of salvation for those outside of the church in the "nations" of the world. But others detect universalistic language and a call to global mission in John's visions.[9] It is hoped that the following analysis of the rhetoric of the repentance calls in Revelation will shed some illumination on the matter.

## B. The Call to Repentance in the Seven Letters

Because repenting, *μετανοεῖν*, as a word or as a theme, is not evenly spread throughout Revelation, but occurs frequently in the messages to the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3, the theme of repentance in the letters will be explored first. Then its use and occurrence in the rest of the Apocalypse will be considered.

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[8]The Greek of Rev 3:20 is third person, masculine, singular, and should strictly be translated "eat with him" but in order to be gender inclusive (as most modern translations attempt to be where possible) I have translated it thus throughout. The same applies to Rev 3:22.

[9]Bauckham, Climax of Prophecy, p.238f, finds the lack of harmony on this issue amongst contemporary scholars regrettable.

## 1. Repentance Elements in the Structure of the Letters

All seven churches reflect different stages of spiritual decline or ascent, covering a comprehensive range of spiritual experiences. Functionally the seven messages are designed to stimulate a response in the hearer at a personal, local church and circuit-wide[10] level. In most cases the desired response is repentance. It is likely that what John has in mind is a form of "Second Exodus" in which the reader is persuaded to return to a purer form of faith and obedience, rather than a liberation from paganism for the first time. As Casey clearly shows in his article on the Exodus theme in Revelation,[11] John was heavily influenced by this theme and its typology. However, I hope to show that with regard to repentance the second Exodus from Babylon, and the regaining of inheritance that is associated with it, is more in the Seer's mind than the first Exodus from Egypt.

Many literary structures have been suggested and developed for Revelation as a whole, as well as the seven messages' place within the whole text, and indeed their own micro-structure.[12] The fact that there is little agreement about this among scholars might be seen as problematic by some, but not all. Schüssler Fiorenza believes that "one can find almost as many outlines and structurations (*sic*) of Revelation as there are scholars studying the book". But she holds that this in fact "speaks for the rhetorical skill of the author."[13] However, this chapter will not attempt literary or form analysis for its own

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[10]Aune believes the letters "were clearly intended to complement one another and to be read and heeded by the other congregations." Aune, "Form and Function", p. 184. Also Beasley-Murray, p. 78.

[11]J Casey, "The Exodus Theme in the Book of Revelation Against the Background of the New Testament", Concilium 189 (1987): 34-43.

[12]Discussed in many places, e.g. Bauckham, Climax of Prophecy, pp. 2-37, Aune, Revelation 1-5, pp. *xc-cv*, and Mazzaferri, pp. 330-374. See Aune, "Form and Function", pp. 182-184, for a concise critique of various structural suggestions.

[13]Schüssler Fiorenza, Revelation: Vision of a Just World, p. 34.

sake. Rather the messages to the seven churches will be structurally analysed in terms of their calls to repentance. This will be done in order to draw out the rhetorical rôle that repentance plays within them and to provide a tool for analysing the inter-textuality of repentance motifs which recur throughout the rest of the Apocalypse.[14]

Each letter contains up to five elements that relate in some way to repentance. These are:

i. The call to repentance itself.

ii. The parameters, or limitations of that call.

iii. A warning (or warnings) as to the consequences of a lack of repentance.

iv. A promise (or promises) as to the consequences of heeding the call.

v. A formula for the reception of the message.

Most of these elements occur in each of the letters although in a slightly differing order. Many of the promise and warning motifs found in the letters then reappear in the rest of Revelation. These will be drawn out in detail below and an analysis of their significance will follow later in the chapter. From this we will be able to analyse in what relationship they occur to the other narrative elements of their own pericope and indeed the Apocalypse as a whole.

It is evident from the material below that this form of analysis is more productive for some of the letters than it is for others. However, the two letters that do not have specific calls to repentance, Smyrna and Philadelphia, do yield some valuable information. By including them, a pattern of repentance elements is shown to inform the structure of all seven of the messages. It will also become evident, from the application

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[14]For an alternative approach to rhetorical analysis of the structure of the letters see Kirby, pp. 200-204.

of this analytical tool, that the concept of repentance is central to the septet's rhetorical function and its theology.

a. Ephesus - Rev 2:1-7

*The Call* - The call, "Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first" (Rev 2:5), is made in the context of a reminder of their previous exemplary ways (Rev 2:4). The call thus directs them to return to their earlier pattern of behaviour. This is designated as "first love" behaviour by John.

*The Parameters of the Call* - The repentance call applies to the whole Ephesian community. However, because they have some good points the call does have some limitations. Due to the fact that they test apostolic claimants (Rev 2:2) and hate the heretical Nicolaitans (2:6), the Ephesians do not need a total change of behaviour.

*The Consequences of a Lack of Repentance (Warning)* - The Ephesians are threatened "If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place." (Rev 2:5). This reflects the description of Christ in the greeting (Rev 2:1) where he holds the stars and walks among the lampstands. (On this phenomenon and others like it see the section on recurrence below, p. 103.)

*The Hearing Formula* - Rev 2:7 is the first occurrence of the rhetorical formula that defines the way in which the repentance call is to be received by the hearers of the text. "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." The three essential features of this reception formula are aural reception, community wide application and message transmission by the Spirit.

*The Consequence of Repentance (Promise)* - The rewards offered are for those who successfully hear the call and repent, making the rewards conditional. They are also quite substantial. "To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of

life, which is in the paradise of God" (Rev 2:7). Physical pleasure, biblical metaphor and proximity to God himself are combined in this promise in such a way as to appeal very persuasively to the reader.

b. Smyrna - Rev 2:8-11

*The Call* - No call to repent as such is needed for the Smyrnan church because they are without fault. Alternately they are called to "Be faithful, even to the point of death" (Rev 2:10) in order to receive the reward. However, the call to be overcomers is also relevant to a study of repentance as will be demonstrated below.

*The Parameters of the Message* - The letter refers to, but does not actually address the "Synagogue of Satan" (Rev 2:9). So the message, and any implied call, is addressed to all in the community except them. In fact the 'Synagogue of Satan' is usually interpreted as some kind of external opposition.[15]

*The Consequence of Heeding the Call (Promise)* - Those who are faithful are told "I will give you the crown of life" (Rev 2:10) and those who overcome "will not be hurt at all by the second death" (Rev 2:11b).

*The Hearing Formula* – In this letter it occurs at Rev 2:11a before the final promise and the end of the message.

c. Pergamum - Rev 2:12-17

*The Call* - Pergamum is called upon to repent (Rev 2:14-16) despite having remained true to Christ in the city of Satan's throne. It is perhaps even more surprising that they are called to repentance despite having suffered loss through martyrdom (Rev 2:13). Specifically they are commanded to repent from the false teaching of idolatry and

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[15]G B Caird. The Revelation of St John the Divine. Black's New Testament Commentaries. Second Edition (London: A & C Black, 1984). p. 35; Beasley-Murray. pp. 81-82.

immorality promoted by Balaam, and for tolerating the presence of the Nicolaitans and their unspecified heresy (Rev 2:14-15).

*The Parameters of the Call* - Only a section of the community at Pergamum is at fault. These are the ones holding (*κρατοῦντας*) to the false practices of Balaam and those holding to the false teachings of the Nicolaitans. However, it is significant that the whole community is called to repent. The implication of this is that even the toleration of these dissenters is in itself something to repent of.[16] One of the things that Christ has against the church is that these people are tolerated within it (Rev 2:14).

*The Consequences of a Lack of Repentance (Warning)* – Lack of repentance will result in punishment, couched here in conflict language, *πολεμήσω*, via the "sword of my of mouth" (Rev 2:16). This reflects the description of Christ in the greeting (Rev 2:12) where he "has the sharp, double-edged sword." So the consequence of a lack of repentance will be a violent purge inflicted by Christ. What is more it is specified that punishment will come to them quickly, *ταχύ*. So by implication immediate action is being called for in the Pergamum community.

*The Hearing Formula* - The hearing formula occurs at Rev 2:17a before the final promise and thus before the end of the letter.

*The Consequence of Repentance (Promise)* - Rev 2:17b "To everyone who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give a white stone, and on the white stone is written a new name that no one knows except the one who receives it." The emphasis here, on secret and hidden rewards, reflects on the local situation of

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[16]For a discussion of precisely what John expects his readers to repent of. see below. pp. 148-156.

external persecution, internal division and false teaching. The idea of receiving a new name, *ὄνομα καινόν,* points to repentance being a rebirth experience.

d. Thyatira - Rev 2:18-29

*The Call* - The core issue at Thyatira is one of tolerating the presence of evil, as it is in the church at Pergamum. It is worth noting that the call for Jezebel to repent is referred to as having occurred in the past, "and I gave her time so she could repent" (Rev 2:21). This signifies that previous calls to repent made to the community at Thyatira are known of by John and most likely were given by him. Jezebel has had time to recant but now it would seem the opportunity has been withdrawn and her punishment is imminent. However, those who commit adultery with her are still able to repent. In fact they are being called to do so indirectly in Rev 2:22, "I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways."

*The Parameters of the Call* - No direct call to repent is made to the whole church at Thyatira. Jezebel has been addressed individually and her followers are currently being called to repent. But from what has just been said to Pergamum, and because Jezebel's presence is perceived to be an indictment on the whole church, there is an implication, at least, of a church-wide call to repentance. Also in Rev 2:23 there is what may be a veiled circuit-wide appeal to repent and be converted. Jezebel's children will be killed for the specific purpose of convincing "all the churches" that Christ is "he who searches hearts and minds" and who will "repay each of you according to your deeds."

*The Consequences of a Lack of Repentance (Warning)* - There are three 'warnings and punishments' couplets in the Thyatiran letter. Jezebel, who has refused to repent will "be cast on a bed of suffering". The punishment for those who refuse to

repent of their adultery with her is more vague, they will "suffer intensely," *θλῖψιν μεγάλην* (Rev 2:22). Her children, who are not given any specified opportunity to repent, will be struck dead. The seeming injustice of this punishment of innocent, illegitimate children implies that adultery within the Thyatiran community is not so much physical as spiritual, and that the "children" are not literal offspring but devotees[17] or perhaps the actual heretical doctrines and practices inspired by Jezebel.

*The Consequence of Repentance (Promise)* – The text implies that any amongst those committing adultery with Jezebel will be spared the intense suffering of Rev 2:22 if they repent in the way that they are called upon to do. But this rapprochement is not spelled out. Specific promises are only made to "the rest of you in Thyatira" (Rev 2:24), that is, those who have stayed well clear of Jezebel's influence. The promises centre around the gift of power and authority, rulership and government. The gift of the 'morning star' is also promised to the overcomer (Rev 2:28). This gift of the 'morning star' would appear to be a share in the messianic status of Christ.[18] However, these gifts and rewards are conditional upon the Thyatiran church expelling Jezebel from their community. (See "Conditionality" section below, p. 100).

*The Hearing Formula* - In this letter, and the three that follow, the reception formula occurs at the very end of the letter (Rev 2:29).

e. Sardis - Rev 3:1-6

*The Call* - Sardis is called first to "Be watchful!" *γίνου γρηγορῶν* (Rev 3:2), and then to repent (3:3). The criticism levelled at them is that they have given up before

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[17]L Morris, Revelation (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1987), p. 72; Caird, p. 44.
[18]Aune, Revelation 1-5, pp. 212-213.

completing the task and are thus dead. The call forms a list of instructions; watch (or awaken), strengthen (or establish - *στηρίζειν*), remember, keep and repent.

*The Parameters of the Call* - The call is addressed non-specifically in Rev 3:3. However, the next verse informs the reader that Sardis has "a few people . . . who have not soiled their clothes." Presumably this group has no need to repent, so the call does not directly apply to them.

*The Consequences of a Lack of Repentance (Warning)* - For the Sardis church John's warnings are mostly subtle ones. Rev 3:2 implies that if they do not wake up as commanded then that which is about to die (*τὰ λοιπὰ ἃ ἔμελλον ἀποθανεῖν*) will in fact die. The promise in Rev 3:5 not to blot out their names from the book of life also carries the implication that if they do not overcome and repent then their names will indeed be blotted out. The only really open warning or threat to the unrepentant at Sardis is the distinct possibility that they could be caught unprepared by Christ in the guise of a thief (Rev 3:3).[19]

*The Consequence of Repentance (Promise)* - A reward of being dressed in white is offered to "He who overcomes" (Rev 3:5). At this point *ὁ νικῶν* is followed by *οὕτως* which is literally translated "in similar manner". The overcomers will receive a similar reward to those referred to in Rev 3:4 who have never soiled their robes. This indicates that, here at least, the act of 'overcoming' is synonymous with the act of repenting whilst still distinguishing the two types of redeemed believers. (For the further implications of this distinction see below, especially pp. 101f.) The other consequences of repentance and conversion at Sardis are "I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels" (Rev 3:5).

*The Hearing Formula* - The standard hearing formula is given at the end of the letter (Rev 3:6).

f. Philadelphia - Rev 3:7-13

*The Call* - As with the church at Smyrna no call to repentance is made to the Philadelphian Christians because none is needed. There is an evil faction in the community, another "Synagogue of Satan," (Rev 3:9) as there was in the Smyrnan church. But even though Christ will cause them to acknowledge their error no opportunity to repent of their evil ways is mentioned or given to this 'synagogue'.

*The Consequences of Heeding the Call (Promises)* - The consequences of remaining true are manifold for the Philadelphian community. They will have an open door (Rev 3:8), be preserved from the "hour of trial" (3:10), be made pillars in God's temple and have written on them various holy names (3:12). These later benefits are specifically offered to "him who overcomes". However, given the context of the message, with those addressed not being called to repent, overcoming is not necessarily synonymous with repentance as it probably is in the previous message to Sardis.

*The Hearing Formula* - The reception formula occurs at the very end of the pericope (Rev 3:13).

g. Laodicea - Rev 3:14-22

*The Consequences of a Lack of Repentance (Warning)* - In the message to Laodicea the warnings and consequences for the church are detailed some way before the actual call to repent. They are specifically threatened with being spat out of Christ's mouth, a shocking and graphic metaphor for violent and utter rejection from a place of intimacy.

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[19]For a further discussion of the thief motif, see below p. 114.

*The Call* - The call to repent itself (Rev 3:19), which does not come until after the retribution, is also accompanied by the divine motivation for the call, "I rebuke[20] and I discipline all those whom I love." Whereas Sardis' call was twinned with a command to awaken, the Laodiceans are commanded to be earnest.

*The Parameters of the Call* - The call to Laodicea is made unequivocally to the entire community, without even an implied exception. There are no specified villains or unsoiled minorities as there are with Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis and Philadelphia. Nor are there any good deeds to commend them as there are with Ephesus, Pergamum, Thyatira and Philadelphia. Therefore Rev 3:20 "If anyone hears my voice and opens the door . . ." is the most open of all the calls that occur in Revelation 2 and 3. However, coming as it does within the Laodicean pericope and following the pattern of all the letters, there is nothing to indicate that "anyone" (*τίς* in Rev 3:20) refers, at this point, to people outside John's community.[21]

*The Consequence of Repentance (Promise)* - Those who do repent will dine and fellowship with Christ himself (Rev 3:20). Those who overcome will receive the reward of Christ's triumph. Overcoming has to be fully synonymous with repentance in the Laodicean letter because the call to repent is made community-wide. The ultimate reward offered to repentant Laodiceans is a seat in the throne room of heaven (Rev 3:21). This should be understood as a promise of extraordinary elevation. The recipient will have a share in the property of the godhead as it were. In Metzger's analysis this is

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[20]T Engberg-Pedersen argues that *ἐλέγχειν* in the New Testament carries with it the sense of rebuking in order to convert. "Ephesians 5:12-13: ἐλέγχειν and Conversion in the New Testament". Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft 80 (1989): 89-110. This would therefore make Rev 3:19 a very strong call to repentance indeed. See also Bauckham, Climax of Prophecy, pp. 108-109.

[21]For a further discussion of the call's parameters see the section "Conditionality" below, pp. 100f.

certainly "the highest honor conceivable for a Christian."[22] Lohmeyer sees it as the crowning honour or privilege of all the promises offered to the conquerors in the letters. "*Dieser Spruch verheißt die letzte und höchste Würde; er schließt so wirkungsvoll den Kranz der 7 Ueberwindungssprüche wie der 7 Sendschreiben.*"[23]

*The Hearing Formula* - Once again the reception formula occurs at the very end of the letter (Rev 3:22). It brings to a close Christ's messages to the churches and the first septet of the Apocalypse.

## 2. Analysis of the Repentance Motifs in the Letters

An analysis of the material revealed by the application of the structural tool above reveals a number of interesting questions and issues concerning the nature of repentance as it is portrayed in Revelation 2-3. Of particular value to this thesis are the issues of audience, threat and promise dynamic, and conditionality.

### a. Who is the Audience, One Church or Many?

The format Revelation takes, on the surface, is that of a circular letter intended to go to each of the seven churches in turn and be read in full at each.[24] Why John chose these seven churches and ignored other prominent Christian communities in the area (such as Hierapolis or Troas), and whether he wanted to utilise a Roman postal circuit, is open to discussion and speculation.[25] However, from the implied reader perspective this is not really the important issue. What does matter is that the author intends each church to hear the various messages and calls to repentance. It is quite obvious that the

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[22]B Metzger, Breaking the Code: Understanding the Book of Revelation (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), p. 46. See also Bauckham, The Climax of Prophecy, p. 108 and Beasley-Murray, pp. 108-109.

[23]Lohmeyer, p. 37.

[24]Hemer, p. 14; also Aune, "Form and Function", p. 203; Kirby, p. 201.

calls to repentance in Revelation 2-3 are primarily addressed to those already within Christian church communities[26]. However, the extent to which the messages overlap in their application needs to be considered. Are the other six churches, and any broader believing community that John may have had in mind as potential recipients of his work, also being addressed? Do the calls to repentance made to the worst of the churches have a relevance to those that appear not to need calling, that is Philadelphia and Smyrna?

There is some specific evidence in the text that each call has a circuit-wide as well as a localised application. Rev 2:23 tells the hearer that the punishment of the unrepentant at Thyatira will show "all the churches . . . that I am he who searches the mind and hearts." The reception formula, "he who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches", given at the end of each letter also applies each message to the whole community. This concept is signalled to the reader/hearer of the Apocalypse by the use of the plural *ἐκκλησίαις* occurring in this reception formula. Third person singular exhortations such as those occurring in the reception formula and some of the promises, (Rev 2:26, 3:12 and 3:21) also help to broaden out the application of the calls. Hence the threats and promises made to one church could apply as secondary inducements to repentance wherever they were heard or read in the other churches. (On the phenomena of secondary inducements and reinforcements see the section on 'Recurrence' below, pp. 103-124.)

However, it is important to remember that most of the parenetic material in the letters is voiced in the second person. So from a rhetorical perspective at least (and

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[25]See Aune, Revelation 1-5 for a discussion of these issues, pp. 130-132. Ramsay believed that the Laodicean letter showed evidence of being addressed to a circuit of Christian churches in Phrygia. Ramsay, Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia, pp. 427-428.

probably from the perspective of the original readers) each letter also addresses a group, individuals or a faction of sinners (or saints) specified by the text. The rhetorical strategy of the text also looks for repentance from specified sins, resistance of certain temptations and endurance in the face of persecution and privation. These calls utilise varying literary techniques and localised references in a most effective way (as detailed by Ramsey, Hemer and others). This would indicate that more than just general applications were hoped for by the author. (This phenomenon will be examined, for the Laodicean letter in particular, in the next chapter. Its rhetorical effectiveness on latter-day Laodiceans will be dealt with in Chapters Four and Five.)

It would be very unwise to portray the seven messages as not containing much in the way of crossover application, or community-wide meaning.[27] Nevertheless the analysis of the calls to repentance seen above strongly indicates that there is a level in the narrative at which specific individuals and local groups are being addressed. Hence those who have tolerated or fornicated with Jezebel, for example, are reprimanded by the relevant passage (Rev 2:20) whilst other hearers of that passage, who have not sinned thus, are warned by the condemnation meted out to the fornicators. This pattern of rhetoric and narrative hierarchy can apply throughout the seven letters, not only for the original audiences but also those who feel themselves to be specifically addressed by them such as those interpretive communities to be investigated in Chapters Four and Five.

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[26]As most agree, e.g. Aune, "Form and Function", p. 198, but Mazzaferri, p. 232 and p. 374, would appear to believe that they are addressed primarily to the pagan "nations".

[27]This would appear to be Ramsay's view, e.g. Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia, p. 40. See also the discussion of this view in the section on Ramsay, above p. 41.

b. Threat and Promise Structure

The basic 'threat and promise' structure that dominates most of the letters, relates in quite a straight-forward, authoritative way to the hearer/reader.[28] Rhetorically this acts like a motivating carrot and a threatening stick. The rewards have primarily to do with aspects of the inheritance that the repentant or overcomer will finally receive.[29] They also often relate directly to the person and attributes of Christ and a share in divine power and position. This type of promise occurs elsewhere in Revelation and indeed the New Testament.[30] (See also the section on the Christological introduction below, p. 105).

The threats tend to focus on disinheritance, loss of privilege, a breakdown of the relationship with Christ and "the negative effects of the *parousia*."[31] This *parousia* element introduces a sense of urgency to the threats' rhetorical function. Because of the inherent conditionalism of the letters (see next section) no reader can feel entirely free from the threats contained in them. All readers remain aware of the potential punishments and are therefore motivated to maintain and improve their obedience and vigilance against heresy. Thus one function of the letters is to ". . . link the daily existence of every child of God – never in isolation, but always in the context of a local congregation – to the cosmic struggle between Christ and Satan."[32] The reader/hearer

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[28]The authority is developed through the use of a royal/imperial edict format, see Aune, Revelation 1-5, pp. 126-129.

[29]As shown by G Goldsworthy, The Gospel in Revelation (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1984), pp. 81-85.

[30]As Ladd has pointed out, "The promise that the saints will share Christ's rule and judgement is one that occurs not infrequently in Scripture (Dan 7:9, 22; Matt 19.28; 1 Cor 4:8; 6:2, 3; 2 Tim 2:12; Rev 2:26, 28; 3:12, 21; 5:9-10)." G E Ladd, A Theology of the New Testament, Revised Edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1994), p. 679.

[31]Aune, "Form and Function", p. 192.

[32]Goldsworthy, p. 84.

who responds can therefore be confident that their action is both expedient and of cosmic significance.

c. Conditionality

The conditionality of repentance in the letters is emphasised with the *ἐι δὲ μή* (or *ἐὰν [οὐν] μή* ) construction in Rev 2:5, 2:16, 2:22, 3:3 etc. This, as Aune points out, "introduces the threat of imminent eschatological judgement."[33] Mazzaferri argues convincingly that the letters as a whole help make the soteriology of Revelation strongly conditional.[34] The example of Jezebel at Thyatira (Rev 2:20-24) is the key demonstration of this. Some time in the church's past she has been given, and refused, an opportunity to repent.

> This is clearly meant as a potent warning to all the churches that each believer will be rewarded according to his deeds, (Rev 2:23). Nevertheless, the implication is most manifest that Jezebel's nemesis is likewise conditional. She could have escaped it had she repented.[35]

There is also strong linkage between the conditionality of repentance in the letters and the remembrance of the past. *Μνημονεύειν* is used twice in close conjunction with *μετανοεῖν* (Rev 2:5 and 3:3) and six times in the letters altogether. Aune finds significance in this close association:

> This emphasis on remembering the past constitutes the idealisation of the past implying that all perceived forms of slippage including the

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[33]Aune. "Form and Function". p. 192.
[34]Mazzaferri. pp. 239-240.
[35]Ibid.. p. 240.

> appearance of dissident views and behaviours are based on a nostalgic conception of the purity of the pristine era . . .[36]

The model for this pristine era has to be the restored Davidic kingdom, because John's call is made to those he thinks are remaining in Babylon. This is further brought out later on, especially in Rev 18:4, and less specifically in Rev 14:8. The second Exodus is therefore a model for the call to repentance in the letters and the rest of Revelation.[37] The fact that the Jews under Ezra returned to Zion demonstrates that apathy and inertia can be overcome and that a change of direction can be achieved. The Laodicean letter in particular offers great rewards and restored relationships conditional upon repentance and the zealous pursuit of righteous ideals. Similar calls to purity occur in Hebrews 10 and 1 Corinthians 15.

The soteriological conditionality of the seven messages helps to balance the powerful futuristic focus of Revelation. It was after all written "for Christians who were intoxicated with the present".[38] As Sweet argues, by emphasising that Christ is now amongst them (Rev 2:1) but that they might lose their prize of salvation if they do not hold fast (Rev 3:11) the messages to the churches emphasis that the future rewards depicted in the Apocalypse are not to be taken for granted; they can be lost (Rev 2:14, 20 etc).[39]

d. Overcomers

Finally, many of the promises made in the letters are made to potential "overcomers" or conquerors (*ὁ νικῶν*), Rev 2:11, for example. The relationship that

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[36]Aune, Form and Function", p.192.

[37]On the interplay of Exodus and Second Exodus typology in Revelation see Mazzaferri, pp. 365-378.

[38]J Sweet, Revelation (London: SCM Press, 1990), p. 49.

this term has to repentance and those who repent within the letters, and even the entire Apocalypse, is important. In the Laodicean community everyone is in need of repentance; hence "he who overcomes" (Rev 3:21) within that church must refer to those who are repentant in the manner John envisages. Likewise in the message to Sardis the reward of the overcomer is likened to that of those "who have not soiled their garments" (Rev 3:4-5).

This would again appear to indicate that the overcomer is one who will conquer sin and be converted, or more likely re-converted. Although there have been some attempts to limit the term 'conqueror' to martyrs alone,[40] Beasley-Murray is most likely right, to say that the term refers to all those who believe and accept a share in the victory of Christ.[41] Hence it would seem safe to assume that the promises made to the overcomers apply to all who repent. Those promises thereby act as rhetorical inducements upon the reader, encouraging them to answer the call to repent. This is especially so if Schüssler Fiorenza is right in saying that in Revelation – for the reader – conquering is a future event and only in the past for Christ.[42] The implication of this is that no one is secure in their own achievements or status, even those not called specifically to repent.

It is not without rhetorical significance that the septet of letters ends with the Laodicean pericope. In this message everyone is in desperate need of repentance and assistance with overcoming their conceit. Thus, all the readers/hearers (real and implied) are being persuaded to recognise in themselves a lukewarmness which needs to be

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[39]Ibid.
[40]Kiddle, pp. 61f.
[41]Beasley-Murray, pp. 77-79.
[42]Schüssler Fiorenza, Revelation: Visions of a Just World, p. 48.

overcome. Bearing this, and the points about John's implied audience already made above (section *a*., p. 96) in mind, it is evident that the rhetorical intent of the text is to draw the reader to the acceptance and implementation of the promised aids and power of Christ in order to achieve the necessary spiritual victory. These symbolic aids include the tree of life (Rev 2:7), manna (2:17), a white stone (2:17), the morning star (2:28), the strength of the temple (implied in 3:12), refined gold (3:18), and eyesalve (3:18). This scheme fits in with John's overall rhetorical purpose which Schüssler Fiorenza identifies thus:

> Revelation's rhetorical discourse, therefore, begins and ends with a section of censure and an exhortation to faithfulness. The injunctions, beatitudes, warnings, and promises, which run like a red thread through the book, have the rhetorical function of directing the audience to right action.[43]

## C. Recurrence as a Rhetorical Strategy of the Prophet

### 1. Recurrence and Fulfilment of Warnings and Promises

The recurrence of themes, patterns and motifs has been well known as a feature of the book of Revelation since at least the time of Victorinus (d. 304CE)[44] who produced the first extant commentary on Revelation. Some, like the recurring sets of seven are central to the book's literary structure and thematic core.[45] The reasons given for this vary according to the motif and indeed the commentator. However, it is of interest to this study that a large number of the themes and motifs which first occur

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[43]Schüssler Fiorenza, Ibid., p. 130.
[44]Roloff, pp. 15-17.

within the warnings and promises relating specifically to repentance in the letters, reappear later in the Apocalypse. Hemer has emphasised the fact that there is "a very close relationship between the letters and other parts of the book."[46] Some examples of such recurrences are listed by Minear,[47] Rowland[48] and Court[49] but unfortunately they are not expanded on to any great extent by these writers.

When observed from the perspective of the Seer's community this pattern of recurrence may be of significance to the understanding of the rôle of the call to repentance and the conversion of those to whom that call is addressed, and others that may hear it. These motifs act, as it were, as rhetorical *Leitmotifs* when they recur in this way. They serve to recall, reinforce and enlarge upon the original threat or promise. For example, one function of the description of Christ as a thief in Rev 16:15, "Behold, I come like a thief" could be to re-emphasise the warning made to the church at Sardis in Rev 3:3, "But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief." (On this motif see also below, p. 114). In turn the whole of the Seer's community is warned. All the examples of this phenomenon that have been detected in Revelation 4 to 22 will be examined below.

It has long been recognised that there is a strong thematic and theological connection between the christological introduction of Revelation 1 and the seven letters.[50] A significant feature of each of the seven letters is the partial description of Christ that occurs in each opening statement. These statements combine to form a

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[45]As almost all scholars agree, e.g. Bauckham, The Climax of Prophecy, pp. 7-15.

[46]Hemer, p. 16.

[47]P S Minear, I Saw a New Earth: An Introduction to the Visions of the Apocalypse (Washington DC: Corpus Books, 1968), p. 61.

[48]C Rowland, Revelation, Epworth Commentaries (London: Epworth Press, 1993), pp. 64-65.

[49]Court, pp. 156-157.

recapitulation of the description of Christ given in Rev 1:13-20. Aune calls these "the christological predications."[51] In three of the letters there is a direct link between this description and the warning or threat that relates to repentance in the letter. In that context the relationship between the description of Christ in Revelation 1 and the repentance elements of the letters will be explored. These features could be analysed with the later recurrences of repentance motifs (below section 3). But because they occur before the seven messages in the reader's experience it is worth considering them separately first.

## 2. Recurrence of Repentance Elements in the Christological Introduction

In Rev 1:12-13 Christ is shown among the seven golden lampstands. In the message to Ephesus, Rev 2:1, Christ again walks amongst the lampstands but in 2:5 he threatens those who do not repent: "I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place." In Rev 1:18 Christ describes himself thus, "I became dead but behold now I am alive for ever and ever." In Rev 2:8 (Smyrna), he is described as the one "who died and came to life again" and those who overcome are promised that they "will not be hurt at all by the second death" (Rev 2:11). The message to Pergamum starts by describing Christ as "him who has the sharp, double-edged sword" (Rev 2:12), referring back to the christological feature of Rev 1:16.[52] This motif recurs in a repentance setting in the warning to Pergamum "Repent therefore! Or else, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth" (Rev 2:16).

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[50]As most commentators acknowledge. See for instance Guthrie, The Relevance of John's Apocalypse, pp. 40-43.

[51]Aune, "Form and Function," p. 189. Also Aune, Revelation 1-5, pp. 135 and passim.

[52]The same word is used for sword in Rev 1:18, 2:12 and 2:16. See discussion below, p. 109.

From these examples it can be seen that, at an early stage in the Apocalypse, repentance is closely tied to the book's central character, Christ. This on its own would be enough to show that the call to repentance is an important function of the seven messages and even the whole work. Combined with what follows below, it is evident that the important rôle of repentance helps to demonstrate that Revelation is best read in a holistic way, with the messages as a fully fledged aspect of the document. Equally it suggests that the reader should not overemphasise the difference, in terms of authorial purpose, between the 'apocalyptic' and 'epistolic' sections of the book.

### 3. Recurrence of Repentance Elements from the Letters in Revelation 4-22

There are a number of ways in which the analysis of this material might be structured. Conducting it, church by church, is probably the most straight forward method. It will also be the best approach for maintaining the literary and rhetorical power of each message.

a. Ephesus

The Ephesian church is threatened with the removal of its lampstand if it fails to repent (Rev 2:4). The symbol of the lampstand has already been closely tied to communal acceptance and ecclesiastic status (Rev 1:20). The removal of a lamp's light is part of the graphic fate of Babylon itself. The city of evil is told that "the light of a lamp will shine in you no longer" (Rev 18:23). Hence the reader who fails to heed the Ephesian call will be aligning themselves with the strongest symbol of organised human wickedness.

The promise made to Ephesus of partaking from the tree of life is enlarged upon at length in the triumphal descriptions of paradise in Revelation 22. Here the tree, a central element of the edenically remodelled earth, is described in terms of its fruitful

abundance and healing powers (Rev 22:2). In Rev 22:14 it is once again the repentant, "those who wash their robes" (see also Rev 3:4-5), that have the right to the tree of life. And finally, at the very end of Revelation (Rev 22:19), a threat is made to remove the "share of the tree of life" of anyone who interferes with the text of the book.

So the call to repent in the first of the letters is strongly tied by both promise and threat to the descriptions of good and evil that emerge at the end of the Seer's apocalyptic vision. It is also connected to the inheritance that is promised to the righteous.

b. Smyrna

Although there are none in need of repentance as such at Smyrna, rewards are still offered to the faithful. In as much as the message to specific churches can rhetorically apply over to the whole community of seven churches (above p. 96), this promise, and any development of its motifs, is still relevant. However, it may not be as significant to this analysis as those churches that have specific calls to repent.

Those whose remain faithful in Smyrna are promised a crown of life from Christ himself (Rev 2:10). Those who overcome, *νικῶν* (Rev 2:11), are given the assurance of protection from the second death "He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death." The crown motif recurs in a number of very positive ways throughout Revelation. These act as a positive reinforcement of the promise made to Smyrna. It is part of the apparel of the inhabitants of heaven (Rev 4:4). The white horseman of Rev 6:2 is given a crown as he goes out to conquer. The righteous woman wears a crown of stars in Rev 12:1 and Christ is portrayed wearing a crown in Rev 14:14. Hence the promise in the Smyrnan pericope relates not merely to an attractive trinket but to an

attribute possessed by three of the most positive characters (or role models[53]) in the entire work.

The second death recurs in Rev 20:6 in the context of the millennium. As in the Smyrnan message it is again something that the righteous will be able to avoid. "Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them . . ." A thousand years of ruling with Christ is offered as the reward to the righteous who avoid the second death. This positive reinforcement of the promise to the faithful at Smyrna is then contrasted with descriptions of the second death. In Rev 20:15 it involves the "lake of fire" and in Rev 21:8 the second death is described as "a lake burning with fire and sulphur."

In Rev 21:8 the phrase that the reader has first encountered in the Smyrnan pericope, *ὁ θάνατος ὁ δεύτερος*, is identified as the punishment for "the cowardly, the unbelievers, the polluted, the murderers, the sexually immoral, the sorcerers, the idolaters, and all liars" specifically. In terms of the rhetoric of the text, this inclusive list is unlikely to leave any reader feeling entirely comfortable about their own chances of avoiding the punishments described. So this could also function as a reminding incentive to repent from sins not specified in the message to the Smrynan church. For although no sin is recorded against Smyrna the mention of the second death in their message and the list of sins associated with it in Rev 20:15 may well be designed to prevent the reader from falling into complacency or even sin.

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[53]As Adela Yarbro Collins points out about the woman figure of Revelation 12, "her story is told to help the readers understand and respond to their own situation." A Y Collins, The Apocalypse (Dublin: Veritas, 1979), p. 88.

c. Pergamum

The sharp two-edged sword, *τὴν ῥομφαίαν τὴν δίστομον τὴν ὀξεῖαν* (Rev 2:12), and the sword of Christ's mouth, *ῥομφαίᾳ τοῦ στόματος* (2:16), are motivators for the church in Pergamum to repent and remain true. Death and violence by the sword are prevalent and graphically detailed in Revelation. In Rev 6:4 the red horseman is armed with a sword (presumably by the heavenly being of 6:3) specifically for doing his work of spurring on the unrighteous to slay each other. The more general and reciprocal death of Rev 13:10 is likewise by the sword. "If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword he will be killed." However, in these two places John uses a different word for sword, *μάχαιρα*. This was usually used to mean a short sword or dagger[54] and is less relevant as a recurring of the motif of the Pergamum message than where *ῥομφαία* recurs. *Ῥομφαία* usually implies a much larger weapon used for piercing and often carries the meaning of pain or anguish.[55]

Thus the recurrences of *ῥομφαία* would have had greater resonance with the late first century reader/hearer who would have distinguished between these two terms. The pale horseman (Rev 6:8) and his companion Hades are given authority to slay *ἐν ῥομφαίᾳ*, though they have famine, plagues and wild beasts as additional tools. But most relevant of all, as a reinforcer of the sword motif of the Pergamum pericope, is that slaying with a 'sharp' sword, *ῥομφαία ὀξεῖα*, forms part of the description of the action of Christ in Rev 19:15. (This motif also links to the christological description in Rev 1:16 as discussed above, p. 105.) So by reading/hearing further into the apocalyptic vision of John the implied reader of the Pergamum pericope (and by extension all of the

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[54]Aune. Revelation 1-5. pp. 181-182.

Seer's implied readers) discovers that by refusing to repent, or delaying their revival, they will share the same violent fate of the nations, meted out by God's terrible agents or even Christ himself.[56] The secondary meaning of *δομφαία*, anguish, would not have been lost on the audience either.

The giving and writing of names is a salvific feature of the letter to Pergamum. Faithfulness is defined in terms of remaining "true to my name" (Rev 2:13). Those who overcome are promised "a white stone with a new name written on it" (Rev 2:17).[57] The 'divine bestowal of names' motif recurs in Rev 14:1 where the select 144,000 have "his (the Lamb's) name and his Father's name written on their foreheads". The inhabitants of the New Jerusalem are likewise endowed, for "his name will be on their foreheads" (Rev 22:4). The idea of a name being written and kept also recurs in Rev 19:12 with Christ himself. "He has a name written on him that no-one knows but he himself." The construction and vocabulary of the Greek here is very similar to Rev 2:17. In the christological passage, Rev 19:12, Christ has *ὄνομα γεγραμμένον ὃ οὐδεὶς οἶδεν εἰ μὴ αὐτός* and the repentant overcomers of Pergamum are each given *ὄνομα καινὸν γεγραμμένον ὃ οὐδεὶς οἶδεν εἰ μὴ ὁ λαμβάνων* (Rev 2:17). This close identification with Christ, receiving a secret name in such a similar way to him, provides an additional incentive for the reader to repent, imitate Christ and overcome.

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[55]See "*δομφαία*" in W Bauer, W Arndt and F W Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, Second Edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).

[56]Metzger emphasises Christ's rôle in leading the punishing agencies: "That sword is his word: it is his only armament. By it he convicts, convinces and exonerates.", p. 91.

[57]For the possibility of John's use of pagan practices as source for this image see G Horsley, "Name Changes as an Indication of Religious Conversion in Antiquity", Numen 34 (1987): 1-17. Hemer, p. 103, finds a link between this passage and 1 Cor 13:9-12.

d. Thyatira

The consequences for being unrepentant at Thyatira are great suffering, *θλῖψιν μεγάλην*, and death, *ἀποκτενῶ ἐν θανάτῳ* (Rev 2:22-23). These threats are perhaps too vague for specific parallel or enlargement to occur later in the book. However, the suffering and sickness caused by the plagues, as detailed in Rev 16:8-11 for instance, are probably close enough to act as a general reinforcement of the threats of the Thyatiran letter. Likewise the ascending smoke of tormented sinners (Rev 14:11), the stings of scorpions (9:5), and the tongue-bitingly painful pox that infects those who refuse to repent, (16:11), helps to fill in the gaps for any prosaic reader who may not be able to imagine what *θλῖψιν μεγάλην* might involve. There is no shortage of torment, pain and death imagery in Revelation.

The Harlot of the great city which, as scholars have long recognised represents Rome[58], is described in Rev 17:18. She bears certain distinct similarities to the Jezebel of the Thyatiran letter, Rev 2:20-23.[59] The similarity centres primarily around both the Harlot (Rev 17:2-5, 18:3 and 18:9) and Jezebel (Rev 2:20) leading people to commit immorality, *πορνεύειν*. Apart from earlier in Revelation 2, *πορνεύειν* occurs only in these two places in Revelation, a fact which strengthens the case for this being a deliberate motif link.[60] There is also a linguistic connection between the two evil women through the verb *πλανᾶν*. Jezebel deceives (*πλανᾷ*) the servants of Christ with her teaching (*διδάσκει*), and the Harlot has deceived (*ἐπλανήθησαν*) all the nations with her magic spells (*φαρμακείᾳ*, Rev 18:23).

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[58]For instance, Court, p. 102 and p. 125.
[59]Caird, p. 45 and pp. 212-213.
[60]*Πορνείᾳ*, *πόρνη* and *πόρνος* do, however, occur in a number of other places.

Another correlation between the two women that Hemer touches on is the number of references to trades, commerce and craftsmen in the descriptions of those who are influenced by the Harlot in Revelation 17 and 18. Many of the trades listed are those that Thyatira was renowned for.[61] These details provide the reader/hearer with an expansion of the Jezebel character, linking her deception, immorality and fate with that of the great Harlot of chapters 17 and 18. Although in Rev 2:23 the angel's remark, "I will repay each of you according to your deeds", made to those who have tolerated or fornicated with Jezebel, is not expanded upon, the Harlot's fate is certainly graphic enough as will now be shown.

The Harlot's fate is recorded in Rev 17:15-18. She is brought to ruin and then exposed, burned and eaten alive by the beast and by the ten horns. Such a gruesome punishment could well function as an enlargement on the fate of the unrepentant Jezebel and her followers. Additionally being eaten by beasts harks back to the first Jezebel's similar fate recorded in 1 Kings 21:23-24 and 2 Kings 9:35-36.[62] In Rev 2:22-23 the fate of Jezebel of Thyatira and her followers is not embellished much, in fact it seems John might have been momentarily caught short of metaphors, as he just says, *αὐτῆς ἀποκτενῶ ἐν θανάτω* (Rev 2:23). However, the fact that her suffering takes place on a bed, would appear appropriate if she is a counterpart of a harlot. For this re-emphasis to function rhetorically depends upon the reader making the connection between the two women, but if the evidence above is taken into account this would happen fairly easily.[63]

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[61]Hemer, p. 127, fn. 79.

[62]Most commentators focus only on what is probably the primary Old Testament allusion for this passage, Ezk 23:26-29. Aune, however, also recognises the reference to the fate of Jezebel. D E Aune, Revelation 17-22, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books, 1998), pp. 956-957.

[63]Aune, Revelation 1-5, p. 204, considers the link to be a strong one.

Although 'Jezebel' has subsequently become a powerful and popular metaphor for feminine wickedness it is not used as such elsewhere in Scripture. Surprisingly, bearing in mind its subsequent popularity as a metaphor, this is the only metaphorical usage of the name in either the New Testament or the Hebrew Bible. But the fact that Jezebel caused her husband Ahab to revoke his repentance (1 Kings 21), along with her famed idolatry, may be why John chose to use the name here in the Thyatiran letter. It is unlikely that the woman at Thyatira was actually named Jezebel, if indeed an individual woman was the source of the conflict.[64] Aune, sees her as possibly a heterodox lay-leader,[65] Caird, as an aberrant prophetess,[66] whereas Schüssler Fiorenza, believes that 'Jezebel' refers to a heretical group.[67]

Those that overcome and need only repent of their toleration of Jezebel are promised power and "authority over the nations" (Rev 2:26). These motifs of empowerment are further developed in Rev 5:10, "you have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God, and they will reign on earth." In fact the suppression of the old powers and the authority of evil in order to allow God's people to reign with Christ is a recurrent motif in Revelation. Repentant Thyatirans are also promised "an iron sceptre" with which they can exercise their new-found power (Rev 2:27). This symbol occurs once more in the hand of the male child, who symbolises Christ, as he sits on the heavenly throne, "a male child, who will rule (or shepherd) all of the nations with an iron sceptre" (Rev 12:5). Again the close identification with Christ is a motivational embellishment of the original promise of Rev 2:27. The readers of the Thyatiran

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[64]On the possibility of identifying Jezebel with a historical individual see Hemer, pp. 117-120.
[65]Aune, Revelation 1-5, p. 203.
[66]Caird, pp. 43-44
[67]Schüssler Fiorenza, Revelation: Vision of a Just World, p. 56.

message are promised not just an object associated with Christ (ῥάβδος σιδηρᾶ) but also that they will use it for the same activity that he did, to shepherd, or rule, over the nations. This is a significant promise as it gives the repentant conqueror an active part in the victory of God.[68]

It would seem therefore that the symbol/person of Christ is used to motivate the reader in two ways. He is an example of pure behaviour and total obedience, past, present and future. But he is also that which they might become, having already taken possession of many of the things that the repentant are promised.

The final promise that is used to motivate the Thyatiran community to repent is the gift of the morning star (Rev 2:28). The meaning of this gift, and its connection to the churches in particular, is explained at the very end of the Apocalypse, "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the root and offspring of David, and the bright morning star" (Rev 22:16). The morning star is therefore Christ, and once again the reward for the repentant overcomer has christological overtones. These allusions refer back to the material of the letters to the churches and they occur here in Revelation's last chapter. This lends further support to the case that a deliberate rhetorical strategy of recurrent repentance related motifs is being deployed by John.

e. Sardis

In the pericope addressed to the church at Sardis those that do not repent will be visited by Christ in the guise of an unexpected thief (Rev 3:3). This is an image of Christ which probably originates in the synoptic tradition which has Jesus using it to explain the unexpectedness of the parousia (Matt 24:42-44 and Luke 12:35-40).[69] John utilises the

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[68]Morris, Revelation, p. 74; Beasley-Murray, p. 93.
[69]As most recognise, e.g. Beasley-Murray, p. 96; Roloff, p. 58.

motif for a second time in Rev 16:15. "See, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake and is clothed, not going about naked and exposed to shame." Here the motif is enlarged by the detail that it is clothes, i.e. salvation/righteousness, that will be stolen or removed.[70]

When viewed within the narrative context of Revelation 16, verse 15 appears to be juxtaposed against the flow of the writer's purpose. The larger context here is a detailed apocalyptic description of the seven bowls. The words of Christ are inserted right into the middle of the sixth bowl. Even if they appeared between bowls it would be unusual. By breaking the rhythm of the septet in this way the verse catches the reader unawares, just as a thief might. This compels the reader to address the essential issue of the thief motif and to recall the imagery of the letter to Sardis, as well as the parenetic words of Jesus himself from the Gospel tradition.

Early twentieth-century commentators such as Charles and Lohmeyer found this interjection so abrupt that they sought for evidence that it was misplaced from elsewhere in the book by a later redactor.[71] They both favour Rev 3:3 as the original location. It is perhaps not surprising that with their predefined agenda concerning the text, commentators such as Charles found such interjections as Rev 16:15 to be problematic. However, their contemporary, Swete, considered the occurrence of the thief motif here to have a "special appositeness in this context".[72] More recent writers are also willing to recognise that the verse is in its correct and original context. Furthermore it is a deliberate rhetorical device of John's, for as Sweet puts it, "the Christ of the letters

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[70]This would seem to have a particularly strong link to the Lukan passage (Luke 12:35-40) where the idea of being dressed and ready to serve the master is an important feature of those who will not be deceived by the "thief". Few commentators pick up on this, however.

[71]Charles, ICC Commentary, Vol. II, p. 49; Lohmeyer, p. 114.

[72]Swete, p. 209.

breaks in here in case the churches should miss it."[73] Caird also finds a strong link here with the seven messages, though he does not emphasise the repentance aspect of the passage.[74]

In the church at Sardis those that overcome are not identical with those who have not fallen. But they will receive the same reward if they do overcome. This is obvious from Rev 3:4-5a, "But you still have a few people in Sardis who have not defiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, because they are worthy. He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white clothes." In order to be judged as overcomers they must repent of the unrighteousness specified in the text of the letter. In the case of Sardis this unrighteousness is defined in terms of drowsiness, spiritual hypocrisy and the forgetting of earlier instruction (Rev 3:1-3).

The promises offered to the repentant overcomers in the church at Sardis are being dressed in white clothing, the preservation of their names in the book of life and the acknowledgement of their names by Christ before the Father (Rev 3:5). These motifs and ideas are also developed at length in the following chapters of Revelation.

White, as a representation of salvation and godliness, is utilised by John over a dozen times throughout his book. As Ladd points out, "white in the Revelation is always associated with Christ or with spiritual victory."[75] The places where the phase *περιβαλεῖται ἐν ἱματίοις λευκοῖς* (or similar wording) occur are likely to be the most deliberate literary reinforcements of the repentance promise given to the church at Sardis. A number of groups throughout Revelation are depicted clad in white, including the twenty-four heavenly elders (Rev 4:4), the martyrs under the altar (6:11), the great

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[73]Sweet, p. 249.
[74]Caird, p. 208.

multi-ethnic crowd who stand before the Lamb and throne (7:9), and the armies of heaven (19:14). Each group of white-clad beings acts as an incentive on the reader to respond to the call of the letter to Sardis. The strongest reinforcement comes at Rev 7:13-14 where a question is asked in heaven, by an elder, regarding the identity of *οἱ περιβεβλημένοι τὰς στολὰς τὰς λευκάς*. It is significant both that it is their clothing that triggers the attention of the inquisitive heavenly elder, and that the means by which their robes have been whitened is washing them in the salvific blood of the Lamb, (Rev 7:14). Secondary linkages might be drawn from the positive association with attributes of Christ that are described as white. These include his head and hair, (Rev 1:14), his conquering white horse (6:2), the white cloud that transports Christ to earth at the *parousia* (14:14), the white horses ridden by the white-clad armies of heaven (19:14) and Gods' white judgement throne (20:11).

The "writing of names in the book of life" motif recurs at Rev 13:8, negatively; 17:8, negatively; 20:15, negatively; and 21:27, positively. At Rev 13:8 and 17:8 those excluded from the book are associated with the beast and at 20:15 "anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire." So although being written into the book is a positive image for Sardis, John's later references lean heavily towards a negative reinforcement. They stress what will happen to individuals who do not have their names recorded in the book of life. However, his 'promise and threat' motivational method is still in evidence with this motif. This is revealed by the one positive occurrence of the motif being directly tied to the highly detailed, glorious description of the heavenly city (Rev 21:1-26). This then is the fabulous reward for those that repent at Sardis.

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[75]Ladd, Theology, p. 674.

The final motif connected with repentance for the Sardis church is Christ's acknowledgement and validation of his redeemed before the Father (Rev 3:5). This is further developed throughout chapter 7, and Rev 14:4, though not too specifically. It is also implicit in all of the 'book of life' references where the modifier 'Lamb's' is used, such as Rev 13:8 and 21:7.

f. Philadelphia

Philadelphia, like Smyrna, has no one that needs to repent as such. But as was shown with Smyrna the re-emphasis of promises made to the faithful and the overcomers adds rhetorical emphasis to Revelation's overall call to repent. Being part of God's temple, the promise given to Philadelphia in Rev 3:12, recurs in Rev 7:15 with the additional honour of service. The temple itself is described further in Rev 11:19 and Rev 15:8ff. It is one of the central motifs of the book.

Additionally in Rev 21:22 the temple transforms into God himself, "for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb." This would suggest that to be a pillar in God's temple is to have a share in divinity itself. Hemer considers that this allusion in the Philadelphian pericope refers back to the temple of Solomon.[76] But the references later in Revelation to the heavenly temple and heavenly city surely have a link with the promise of Rev 3:12 as Aune and others acknowledge.[77] The promise of writing sacred names on the redeemed, which is also made to Philadelphia at this point, recurs later in Revelation as has been demonstrated in the section on the Pergamum pericope, (above, pp. 109-111).

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[76]Hemer, pp. 175-176.
[77]Aune, Revelation 1-5, p. 241; Court, pp. 157-158.

g. Laodicea

Laodicea is the most metaphorical of all the letters,[78] so it is not surprising that many motif recurrences are drawn from its material as John's visions proceed. Its highly metaphoric content is a fitting end to the septet because the multiple capacity for meaning of such motifs provides all readers with the maximum capacity for self-recognition in the text. Likewise its language is far more personal and individualistic than that of the preceding six oracles and its appeal is therefore more penetrating to the reader.[79] It is also distinct from the other messages in that it does not draw material from the Christophany of Rev 1:12-18 but introduces new and arresting characteristics of Christ, (3:14).

A place on the heavenly throne is promised to the Laodiceans in Rev 3:21, "To the conqueror I will give a place on my throne with me, just as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne." This motif is greatly enlarged upon by the thirty or more occasions that *θρόνος* occurs throughout the rest of Revelation. These references appear fairly consistently through the Apocalypse with a particular concentration in the description of the heavenly court in Revelation 4-5, which immediately follows the Laodicean pericope. Almost every reference to the throne reinforces its desirability as a prize.[80] The throne is glorious (Rev 4:3), otherworldly (Rev 4:2), divinely occupied (Rev 4:10), serviced by angels (Rev 7:11), the focal point of the process of redemption and liberation (Rev 5:7, 16:17)[81], feared by the wicked

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[78]Kirby, p. 204.
[79]A Y Collins, The Apocalypse, p. 31.
[80]The only negative references are to the dragon/Satan's throne in Rev 2:13, 13:2 and 16:10.
[81]R J Surridge, "Redemption in the Structure of Revelation", Expository Times 101 (1990), p. 233.

(Rev 6:16), a place of safety from the dragon (Rev 12:5), the seat of authority and judgement (Rev 20:4), the source of eternal life (Rev 22:1) and so on.

The promise to have a share in God's heavenly throne is probably the strongest positive motivator to repent in Revelation, because "To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might forever and ever!" (Rev 5:13). From the perspective of God's power and kingdom the throne motif is dominant in Revelation. In fact "the main symbol of Revelation is the image of the throne and its main motif that of kingship,"[82] and "the throne image occurs again and again like a keynote symbol throughout the whole book."[83] If this is the case then the implied reader of the Laodicean letter is being powerfully motivated. In her commentary on the throne room vision of Revelation 4 and 5 Schüssler Fiorenza believes that the connection with the promised throne of the Laodicean oracle is a rhetorical one. In fact its function is to point the reader to that divine location.[84]

As each of these references adds to the concept hearers/readers who identify with Laodicea begin to realise that this throne is the most glorious and important place or prize in the universe. Once again the hearers are made aware that a share of divinity is theirs if they repent and overcome. The antecedents of this promise include the 'Merkavah' vision of Ezekiel 1, Solomon's enthronement, 1 Chron 29:22-25, such concepts in Jewish apocalyptic literature as the 'Chosen One' of 1 Enoch 45:3,[85] and enthronement being promised to the 'pious ones' in 4Q521 col. ii.[86]

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[82]Schüssler Fiorenza, "Revelation", in Epp and MacRae, p. 419.
[83]Schüssler Fiorenza, Revelation: Visions of a Just World, p. 58.
[84]Ibid., p. 57.
[85]Aune, Revelation 1-5, pp. 261-263.
[86]Thanks to Loren Stuckenbruck for this reference.

The other promise given to the Laodiceans is that Christ will share a meal with them: "If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to be with them (*lit.* him) and eat with them, and they will eat with me" (Rev 3:20). This promise is fulfilled and the motif developed in the invitation to the wedding supper of the Lamb which occurs in Rev 19:9, "Blessed are those who are invited to the Lamb's marriage supper." Significantly it is *δειπνήσω* that is used in Rev 3:20 and its corresponding noun *δεῖπνον* in Rev 19:9. Aune points out that although this term does not necessarily refer to a meal at any particular time of day, it can refer to the Passover meal.[87] It is used in other Koine sources to refer to cultic meals.[88] It is highly likely, in this Christ related context, that the Eucharist is also being alluded to here.[89] This would also be highly appropriate to the rhetorical strategy of persuading the reader to repent and accept Christ's righteousness.

The imagery may have multiple implications[90] but it is certainly evident that this is no ordinary meal that the Laodiceans are being offered. Christ can be seen as both host, guest and even, symbolically, the meal itself.[91] Through this invitation the righteous are inducted into heaven's greatest celebration, as described in Rev 19:4-8. Those who have particularly been promised such a meal (i.e. the Laodiceans, Rev 3:20) would be especially motivated by this later passage. The Last Supper and the liturgy of the Eucharist are most likely being envisioned by John here in the text. However, the fact that the language is singular rather than plural (the Eucharist being always a communal

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[87]Ibid., p. 261.

[88]See "*δειπνέω*" in Bauer. However, see also Morris, Revelation, who suggests that it implies a causal, leisurely meal, p. 83.

[89]Beasley-Murray, p. 107, Caird, p. 58.

[90]A Y Collins, The Apocalypse, p. 31.

event) would imply that he wishes his readers to go beyond the corporate ecclesiastical event to a more personal salvific experience.

The only other use of *δεῖπνον* in the Apocalypse follows shortly after the wedding supper of the Lamb (Rev 19:9) when the great feast of God (*τὸ δεῖπνον τὸ μέγα τοῦ θεοῦ*) is described in Rev 19:17. This, however, is the antithesis of the Lamb's marriage supper. Flocks of carrion are called upon to feast on the flesh of God's enemies. Although there is no direct link with the Laodicean pericope the fact that *δεῖπνον* (*δειπνήσω*) occurs only in these three places leaves open the possibility that a potential rhetorical function of this gruesome feasting is to persuade the implied reader/hearer of the Laodicean call to see once more the advantages of repentance.

Famously in Rev 3:16 the Laodiceans are threatened with being spat, or even vomited,[92] out of Christ's mouth (*μέλλω ἐμέσαι ἐκ τοῦ στόματός μου*). This motif does not recur as such elsewhere in Revelation, except possible Rev 12:15 where the dragon casts (*βάλλειν*) from its mouth a flood to destroy the woman. The lack of further recurrence of this vivid motif is perhaps surprising, and a little disappointing. Although there is ample enlargement upon the theme of God's rejection of the unrepentant, e.g. Rev 14:9-11, throughout the rest of Revelation the image of rejection via spewing or vomiting does not appear again specifically.

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[91]Karrer sees Christ only in the capacity of co-participant or guest at the meal, p. 215. However, if the synoptic antecedent (see Schüssler Fiorenza, Revelation: Visions of a Just World p. 49) of the imagery are considered it is more likely that he is the host.

[92]Bauer, "*ἐμέω*," has vomit as the literal translation of Rev 3:16. Only the NKJV opts for this translation, with the NRSV, REB, NIV and NASB using the slightly less unpleasant "spit".

An analysis of John's usage of the term "out of their/his/my mouth", *ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ*, is more productive.[93] In Rev 1:16, 9:17, 9:18, 11:5, 12:15, 12:16, 16:13, 19:15 and 19:21 it occurs exclusively within the context of destruction, judgement and death motifs: for example Rev 9:17b, "the heads of the horses were like lions' heads, and fire and smoke and sulphur came out of their mouths." Rev 13:6, "it opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God" does not use the same *ἐκ τοῦ* construction as Rev 3:16, but the negativity of things that come out of mouths is evident there also. However, where "in/into his/their/your mouth" occurs, e.g. Rev 10:9, 10:10, 12:16, and 14:5, *ἐν τῷ στόματί σου* is used to develop a positive or salvific motif. An example of this is Rev 14:5, "and in their mouth no lie was found; they are blameless."[94] All but a couple of the twenty or more uses of *στόμα* in Revelation are involved in this type of positive (in to) or negative (out of) imagery. Hence when the Laodicean reader comes, for example, upon the frogs issuing forth from the mouths of God's enemies in Rev 16:13, there is a strong possibility of recalling that he or she is also on the verge of becoming emetic ejecta so to speak.

Another highly likely reinforcement of the Laodicean repentance elements comes in Rev 16:15.[95] Unless the Laodiceans repent they will remain shamefully naked, Rev 3:17-18. The shame of nakedness is also utilised by John as a symbol of being unprepared for the *parousia* in the startling interjection of Rev 16:15. Although this verse primarily reinforces the Sardian repentance elements as was seen above, (see p. 115) its use of the terms *γυμνός*, *ἱμάτια* and *ἀσχημοσύνην/αἰσχύνη* do remind the

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[93]On the use of *ἐκ* in Revelation see K G C Newport, "The Use of 'Ek' in Revelation: Evidence of Semitic Influence", Andrews University Seminary Studies 24 (1986): 223-230.

[94]Rev 9:9 is the only occurrence of "in their mouths" that goes against this trend.

[95]As suggested by Bauckham, The Climax of Prophecy, p. 107.

reader strongly of the warnings and instructions given to Laodicea in Rev 3:17-18.[96] Once more it would appear that John is employing repetition of terminology and imagery rhetorically, in order to reinforce the calls to repent that he issues to the churches. This is also the case with the Laodicean reference to 'white' clothes. (On 'white' see Sardis section, above p. 116.)

## 4. Analysis of Recurrence Strategy

From the examination of all seven messages above it appears that the re-use later in the book of the repentance-linked motifs found in Revelation 2-3 is a deliberate narrative device of the author's. Although some of the examples given may only be possibilities, their rhetorical impact is considerable when they are taken as a whole. The recognition of such a symbol-dependant rhetorical strategy helps to justify Schüssler Fiorenza's hermeneutical suggestion that:

> Rather than decoding either the images and symbols of Revelation or the whole book into logical, inferential, propositional language, one needs to trace how an image or symbol works within the overall composition of Rev's mythological symbolization.[97]

The repentance symbols and motifs are intended by the author to strengthen the persuasive rhetoric of each call to repentance that is delivered to the churches individually and collectively. They also act as reinforcements to the Apocalypse's overall second Exodus theme. Reward imagery in particular is taken from the readers' primary pre-supposition pool – that is the Old Testament.[98] These functions might not always be

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[96]*Γυμνὸς* occurs in only one other place and both *ἀσχημοσύνην* and *αἰσχύνη* are *hapax legomena* within Revelation.

[97]Schüssler Fiorenza, Revelation: Vision of a Just World, p. 20.

[98]Goldsworthy, p. 84.

the motif's primary purpose in the later stages of the Apocalypse. In fact some have considerable roles to play in other aspects of the work. But as a writer who seeks to influence his audience, John is quite capable of multi-levelled literary ingenuity.

The analysis of this strategy reveals that repentance as a theme in Revelation is more important than the modern reader might realise on the basis of a straightforward 'word count' approach to its analysis.

## D. Repentance in the Rest of Revelation

Repentance as a theological motif, repentance calls and acts of conversion are not as prevalent in Revelation 1 and Revelation 4-22 as they are in the seven messages. Outside of Revelation 2-3 they do not form a pattern or overriding theme again. However, calls to, and acts of, repentance are not absent from the rest of the book.

There are a number of places where it is possible that conversion and repentance have taken place in individuals and groups. An example of this is found in Rev 5:9-10 where the twenty-four elders sing how the Lamb has bought people with his blood and transformed them into priests, presumably indicating a major improvement in their spiritual condition. Of course this does not always equate to repentance but rhetorically speaking it helps to motivate it. Another example is the process of conversion that is symbolically described in Rev 7:14, "they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." As has been shown, this points back to the symbolism of the promises and threats of the letters.

However, *μετανοεῖν* itself occurs in only two passages outside the seven messages, namely Rev 9:20-21 and Rev 16:8-11. These references will be considered

first before other possible occurrences of conversion and repentance, (i.e. those that do not utilise the term *μετανοεῖν* specifically), are analysed.

## 1. The Uses of *Μετανοεῖν* Outside of the Letters

### a. Revelation 9

> And the remainder of the people, those who were not annihilated by these plagues, still did not repent of their handiwork. They did not stop worshipping demons, or idols made of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood which can neither see, hear or walk. And neither did they repent of their murders, their sorceries, their sexual immorality or their thieving. (Rev 9:20-21)

There is an apparent indication that part of the function of the four angels of the sixth trumpet (Rev 9:14-15), and perhaps the other trumpets, and even the seals, is to elicit repentance from those outside the Christian community. Caird considers both the trumpets of Revelation 8-9 and the seals of Revelation 6 to be part of the process of God giving humanity the opportunity to repent.[99] The use of *οὐδέ* in Rev 9:20 is significant; "the people . . . still (*οὐδέ*) did not repent of their handiwork." This supports the idea that previous attempts to call the nations to repent, or at least give them the opportunity to do so, have been made. It would be difficult to accept *οἱ λοιποὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων* as a reference restricted to believers, lapsed or otherwise, or Jews whether of the false or the true synagogue. So it can be understood from this passage that there is an opportunity for those of all races and creeds to repent.

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[99]Caird. p. 295.

However, this is not exactly a Pauline mission to the Gentiles.[100] The plagues might have a chastening effect on some, but it is certainly not their prime function. The expressed function of the four angels of the sixth trumpet is actually to kill a third of humanity. Of the two thirds of those who survives this massacre no one does in fact repent. The implication of the passage is that because this genocide has not resulted in any repentance then nothing will do so.[101] So despite any theoretical opportunity for non-believers to repent, none actually do so at this point in the narrative, neither are they specifically chastened by God or his agents or called to repent by them.

Despite the lack of an actual call to repentance here in Revelation 9, it is possible to learn something about the nature of repentance in the Apocalypse from this passage. Specifically, repentance entails the abandoning of idolatry (Rev 9:20), immorality, murder, and theft, (Rev 9:21). The failure to make these changes in behaviour and in loyalty indicates to the observer, John at this point, that no repentance has taken place in the two thirds of humanity that remain alive.

There is a probable parallel here with the description of the saints in Rev 14:12. The unrepentant have faith in "idols made of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood, which can neither see, hear or walk" (Rev 9:20), and they break the commandments (9:21). Three of their four specified evils relate directly to commandments in the Decalogue of Exodus 20. On the other hand the saints, that is those who have been converted, place their faith in the risen Jesus and specifically do "keep the commandments of God" (Rev

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[100]Nor, I believe, is it the universalism that W E Pilgrim would like to see in "Universalism and the Apocalypse", Word and World 9 (1989): 235-243.

[101]This fact is understood to be another utilisation of the Exodus theme, specifically the Pharaoh's unwillingness to repent, e.g. Sweet, p. 162.

14:12).[102] A specific quality of Jesus within early Christian tradition was his commandment keeping, 1 John 2:3-6.[103] Therefore this reference creates a connection between repentance and Christlikeness, which we have already observed operating in the promises to the repentant in the letters and their subsequent *leitmotifs*.

b. Revelation 16

> The fourth angel poured out his bowl onto the sun, which was given power to scorch people with fire. And men were scorched by the great heat and they blasphemed the name of God, who had authority over these plagues. But they refused to repent so as to glorify him. The fifth angel poured out his bowl onto the beast's throne, and his kingdom was darkened. People gnawed their tongues from the pain and they blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores. But they did not repent of what they had done. (Rev 16:8-11)

The first five plagues of Revelation 16 do not actually kill anyone, assuming that is, that the "living things" killed in the sea in Rev 16:3 are only fish. Hence the plagues may act as a more direct appeal to repent than the four angels of Revelation 9 did. Even so their specified function is to torment, maim, scorch and punish those whose crime is shedding the blood of the saints and prophets, and who will be punished by being given "blood to drink as they deserve" (Rev 16:6). Thus the plagues have primarily a judgement function though repentance is a potential by-product, at least in theory, up

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[102]It is perhaps surprising, bearing in mind the evident usage of the Exodus theme in Revelation, that more commentators do not pick up on this as a probable reference, at one level at least, to the Decalogue of Moses.

[103]R W Wall, Revelation, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), p. 186.

until just before the very end, as it was with the Egyptian plagues of Exodus 7-12.[104] They also seek to effectuate revenge and payment for the spilt blood of the prophets and saints.

But there is scope for the function of these plagues to include calling to repentance and rebuke even though it is not a specified function. What is more, here in chapter 16 the response of the inhabitants of the earth is more specifically related to conversion than it was in Revelation 9. In Rev 9:20-21 there is no reaction either way. Those not killed by the plagues fail to alter the course of their evil ways. But in Rev 16:9-11 they deliberately choose not to repent and refuse to give glory to God. No word for refusal is present in the Greek text but it is implied, as a number of commentators[105] and some translations recognise.[106] Thus they are condemned because they "blaspheme the God of heaven," Rev 16:11. In Revelation 9 there is no indication that the masses have any knowledge of God, being just idolatrous and sinful. But in Revelation 16 there is no doubt that they recognise who he is and that his creatorship makes him the one true God.[107] Nevertheless, despite acknowledging God's power and despite their intense pain they specifically reject God, refuse to glorify him, and blaspheme his name.

c. The Rhetorical Effect of *Μετανοεῖν* Usage in Revelation 9 and 16

The exegesis of the trumpets and plagues in Revelation has been explored in great depth by many writers and is not the main focus of this thesis. Rather we would wish to focus here on the likely rhetorical impact of these repentance references (Rev 9:20-21 and Rev 16:8-11) on the minds of the implied readers, the members in the seven

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[104]Beasley-Murray, p. 242.
[105]Bauckham, The Climax of Prophecy, p. 308; Caird, p. 201; Kiddle, p. 315 and p. 321.
[106](NEB, NIV, TEV, Phillips)
[107]Bauckham, The Climax of Prophecy, pp. 306-309.

churches who have been specifically called to repent. The Seer graphically describes the actions, attitude and fate of those who are incapable of or unwilling to repent. He draws upon one of the best known biblical examples of unrepentant resisters of God's power - the Egyptian Pharaoh and nation.[108] The knowledge of the fate of the Egyptians at the time of the Exodus would have been a familiar part of the readers' literary pre-supposition pool. Fiorenza states that "the bowl plagues do not bring about repentance as the acts of the two prophetic witnesses did (11:13).[109] Rather, they make public the true nature of followers of the beast who blaspheme God."[110] Specifically, of course, they make it known to the implied readers.

These gruesome examples of the fate of the unrepentant are designed to engender a swift and sincere change of heart, a firming up of allegiance, and the desisting from the type of behaviours exhibited by the unrepentant. The rapid, inevitable progress of Revelation's eschatological unfolding helps the reader to recognise that he or she must act swiftly before they fall to the fate of God's enemies. These enemies are both future; inhabitants of the kingdom of the beast, and past; the Egyptians of the Exodus. By observing that lack of repentance can persist, even under extreme duress, the reader sees that the call of God is resistible. The addressees of the seven messages are not compelled to repent, rather they must choose which side they are on. Lukewarmness is not an option.

## 2. Other Occurrences of the Theme of Repentance and Conversion

Rev 16:11 brings to an end Revelation's use of specific repentance terminology. However, there are a number of other places where it is possible that repentance or

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[108]Schüssler Fiorenza. Revelation: Vision of a Just World. p. 93.

conversion is being implied in the narrative. Although conversion and repentance are not identical theologically they are similar enough to be considered together at this point, especially when we are looking for them in places where the specific terms themselves are not used in the text but rather implied by the context.

A number of commentators find considerable elements of conversion and repentance away from occurrences of *μετανοεῖν*. Sweet, for one, cautions his readers that "the passages envisaging ultimate repentance must not be ignored (1:7, 11:13, 14:7, 15:3f, 21:24ff)."[111] Likewise Bauckham's chapter "The Conversion of the Nations"[112] draws heavily on passages from chapters 1, 10, 11, and 14. What follows below is a discussion of those sections of Revelation in which a good number of scholars have found possible references to repentance and conversion.

a. Revelation 1

Rev 1:7 previews[113] the triumph of God in the glorious heavenly appearing of the returning Christ. The first part of the verse, "He is coming with the clouds; every eye will see him, even those who pierced him," certainly gives the impression that individual and communal acts of repentance will take place as the world universally acknowledges the triumph of God and his sovereignty. The passage is an allusion to Dan 7:13[114], a verse that is followed (7:14) by strong assertions of the universal acknowledgement of the dominion of God. The singling out of those who pieced Christ as being in the vanguards of those who acknowledge him at his return is a powerful picture of the

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[109]"Repentance" associated with the witnesses of Revelation 11 is explored below. p.135.

[110]Schüssler Fiorenza, Revelation: Vision of a Just World, pp. 93-94.

[111]Sweet, p. 243.

[112]Bauckham, The Climax of Prophecy, pp. 238-337.

[113]Although the present tense *ἔρχεται* is used this futuristic use of the present is commonplace in oracular and prophetic material. Aune, Revelation 1-5, p. 50.

[114]Ibid., p. 54. Charles, ICC Commentary, Vol. I, pp. 17-18; et al.

reversal of fortunes for God's kingdom.[115] It demonstrates Christ's ability to switch the allegiance of just about anyone and also anticipates the fulfilment of Zech 12:10, "when they look on the one whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him." The context in Zechariah relates to repentance being demonstrated among God's people. Most commentators[116] therefore understand Rev 1:7a to be an occurrence of, or prediction of, conversion or repentance without use of the term *μετανοεῖν*.

The next part of the verse, "and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail," (Rev 1:7b) seems much more negative. However, the wailing (*κόψονται*) here is not necessarily in despair at the coming of Christ. Bauckham in particular interprets this phrase to mean a repentant wailing, placing it within a Christian tradition of positive, testimonial expressions of faith. This is signalled to the reader by the way in which Zech 12:10-12 and Dan 7:13 are conflated, which "suggests that the kingdom of God will come, not so much by the destruction of the nations, as by their repentant acknowledgement of God's rule over them."[117] Bauckham sees this repentance element in Revelation 1 as highly germane to the meaning and purpose of the whole of the prophecy. Others, however, are more cautious although they do allow for the possibility of a positive interpretation of *κόψονται*. Caird does interpret Rev 1:7b to mean that mankind will lament on behalf of Christ, but is right I believe to acknowledge that repentance among the nations is not the principle focus here:

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[115]Caird, pp. 18-19, highlights John's desire to remind his readers that the seemingly invincible power of Rome that slew Christ will be swept away by the Kingdom of God.

[116]For example, Bauckham, The Climax of Prophecy, pp. 318f.

[117]Ibid., p. 322.

> Whether this grief will amount to a true repentance John does not for the present discuss . . . for he is here concerned, not with the ultimate fate of men, but with the ultimate vindication of Christian faith.[118]

Beasley-Murray feels that it is difficult to know whether the wailing is "an acceptable repentance or an unavailing remorse".[119] But he would obviously like it to be the former and he quotes Rev 15:3-4 as a possible justification for Rev 1:7 being a depiction of universal repentance. Roloff even suggests that the passage could be taken to mean that the repentance of the nations comes too late.[120] Sweet[121] sees this verse as preparing the ground for the story of the vast throng (Rev 5:9 etc), indicated by the phrase "tribe, tongue, people and nation", that are to be redeemed from the earth. He also finds an indication of sorrowful and repentant behaviour in the Greek phrase *κόπτεσθαι ἐπί* (Rev 1:7b). However, Sweet does not rule out the possibility that the wailing might be in self pity and is ultimately unable to commit to either remorse or penitence in the behaviour of the tribes of the earth. His caution on this issue draws criticism from Bauckham.[122]

There would, however, appear to be an equally plausible, and perhaps even more straight-forward reading of the verse. The universal dominance of Christ's reappearing is indicated by every eye seeing him. This does not have to mean that all convert to him, or that there is redemption on a large scale. Acknowledging God's power is not necessarily synonymous with repentance or conversion in the Apocalypse. This is found in Rev 16:8-11, where *μετανοεῖν* is used (see discussion above, p. 128), and at Rev 11:13

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[118]Caird. pp. 18-19.
[119]Beasley-Murray. pp. 58-59.
[120]Roloff. p. 27.
[121]Sweet. pp. 66-67.

where it is not, (see discussion in the next section, below). It is possible that the Roman soldiers who crucified Christ were still alive, and known, at the time that John wrote, but unlikely. The reference to them is more likely to be illustrative of the extent to which the vindication of the Kingdom of God was envisioned in Revelation and contemporary Christian triumphalism. The second half of the verse can, and has, been read to mean that the parousia engenders tears of fear in the unredeemed observers because they now recognise the power of God their enemy and his son whom they are guilty of slaying. As Ladd puts it, "Christ is not the object but the occasion of their grief; they wail on account of him because of the terrible judgement which he is to inflict upon them."[123] Krodel is also in agreement that the tribes lament "not in godly repentance, but in fear and guilt because they must face their judge."[124]

This passage then cannot be claimed to be an unequivocal occurrence of repentance taking place or being predicted. There are strong indicators that the literary antecedents to the passage were originally used in a repentance setting. However, they are not used here to engender repentance in the reader specifically. Rather "the only concern of the text is to proclaim the coming universal acknowledgement of the lordship of Jesus Christ".[125] From a rhetorical, or even theological perspective it is problematic that the possible repentance of Rev 1:7 does not result in salvation, forgiveness or divine adoption for those who behold Christ returning and wail. Those who are called to repent in Laodicea, for instance, have the results of any such repentance clearly described at the end of their message, Rev 3:20-21. But no such motivational description of God's

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[122]Bauckham. The Climax of Prophecy. p. 322.

[123]G E Ladd. A Commentary on the Revelation of John (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing. 1972). p. 29.

[124]Krodel. p. 87.

[125]Roloff. pp. 27-28.

acceptance of those who might have been converted by the sight of the parousia is spelt out. After a formulaic definition of God the narrative abruptly changes both location and voice, taking the readers attention away from the wailers in order to focus on John and his reception of the vision, Rev 1:9f.

b. Revelation 11

Unlike many other prophets such as Samuel in 1 Sam 12:20-25, Elijah, in 1 Kings 18:20 and John the Baptist in Matt 3:2 (on the Baptist's repentance calls see the section in the next chapter, below pp. 169-185), the two witnesses of Rev 11:3-13 do not deliver a specific call to repentance. Their defined rôle is to witness, prophesy (Rev 11:3, 7), torment (11:6, 10), and to refer back in a parabolic manner to the witness, through death, of Christ (11:7-11). Thus the reader can identify the church's belief in the victory of God over death and evil (and Christian witness/martyrdom for that belief) directly with the death and victory of Christ. The reader might initially think of Jerusalem, when the "city" is depicted, but the motif is quickly expanded to incorporate the entire theatre of Christian witness to the victory of God.[126] The two witnesses are primarily tasked with the encouragement and strengthening of the church rather than the convincing of the nations to worship God. The lengthy time of their witness (Rev 11:3) gives rise to fear and resentment amongst the nations and their death is greeted with relief by God's enemies, Rev 11:9-10.

Nevertheless, a possible by-product of their mission, and in particular the earthquake that marks their vindication and ascension, is a form of conversion. "And in

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[126]On the complexity of this narrative, and its skilful use of Old Testament allusions see R Bauckham, The Theology of the Book of Revelation, New Testament Theology Series (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 84-88; Bauckham, Climax of Prophecy, pp. 273-283; and Aune, Revelation 1-5, pp. 585-602.

that hour a great earthquake occurred and a tenth of the city fell. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and those remaining became terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven" (Rev 11:13). Sweet points out that *ἔμφοβος* can be a positive acknowledgement of God, as in Luke 24:5, 37 and that "give glory to God" is a regular Old Testament expression of repentance.[127]

Caird regards the reactions of the earthquake survivors to be genuine repentance because "in John's vocabulary 'fear', 'do homage,' and 'repent' are almost synonymous terms."[128] Ladd goes so far as to portray it as a hoped for conversion of the Jews before the end of time.[129] However, there is some doubt as to whether the inhabitants fear God in the sense of giving glory and honour to him, or whether they are simply terrified. Caird's own translation of Rev 11:13b does favour his view, "the survivors in awe did homage to the God of heaven."[130] But this is an unusual way of rendering *οἱ λοιποὶ ἔμφοβοι ἐγένοντο καὶ ἔδωκαν δόξαν τῷ θεῷ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ.* It is usually taken to mean that the inhabitants were simply terrified of God rather than in awe and respect of him.[131] Hence the earthquake survivors give glory to God out of fear, they neither obey nor have faith in him. Obeying and having faith in are the criteria which are stated as the prerequisites for being saints, as defined in Rev 14:12. So this may only be an acknowledgement of God, without repentance. This would then be a similar reaction to that of the Babylonian merchants in Rev 18:18-19. Even if the city of Rev 11:13 does

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[127]Sweet, p. 189; also Krodel, pp. 227-228.

[128]Caird, p. 140. See also Charles, ICC Commentary Vol. II, pp. 291-292; and Schüssler Fiorenza, Revelation: Vision of a Just World, pp. 93-94.

[129]Ladd, Commentary, pp. 159-160.

[130]Caird, p. 133.

[131]See the translation of Rev 11:13 in the NIV, NASB, KJV, RSV, NRSV, NEB, REB and Phillips. However, see also Goodspeed which supports Caird.

represent all of humanity,[132] just Jerusalem,[133] or is symbolic of paganism,[134] this passage still does not necessarily refer to the repentance of those outside the Seer's community.

It is informative to compare the reaction caused by the earthquake among the inhabitants of 'Jerusalem' in Revelation 11 to the reaction of the inhabitants of Babylon to their earthquake in Rev 16:18. That earthquake and the accompanying hail storm, described in Rev 16:17-21, causes people to curse God rather than glorify him. So it would seem possible that there is a choice of reactions available in John's apocalyptic worldview. Krodel is correct to point out that to "give glory to God" is the right reaction to the Gospel as specified in Rev 14:7[135] (on 'repentance' in Revelation 14 see next section, below). But as with Rev 1:7, above, the reaction of the earthquake survivors in Revelation 11 receives no divine acknowledgement. If this is an example of repentance caused by the testimony of the two witnesses and the terrifying earthquake it is not spelt out, rather another woe follows, Rev 11:14.

On this issue, and that of whether or not John was a 'Jonah' who did not even want to witness repentance among the nations, Sweet makes the valid point that John's "book is addressed not to the nations but to Christians who are in danger of identifying themselves with the beast"[136]. This is especially true when the text is explored from a rhetorical perspective. By applying Sweet's point to the way the narrative continues on from the possible repentant reaction of the earthquake survivors, one can understand how the third woe might be rhetorically received by Christian readers. The Messiah's kingdom is shown to be triumphant over the world and is proclaimed to be eternal (Rev

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[132]Kiddle, p. 199.
[133]Beasley-Murray, p. 187; Ladd, Commentary, pp. 159-160.
[134]Bauckham, The Climax of Prophecy, p. 278.
[135]Krodel, p. 228.
[136]Sweet, p. 189.

11:15). God is worshipped and praised (Rev 11:16-17), and acknowledged for rewarding the faithful and judging the nations whose futile raging is clearly noted (11:18). Finally the spectacular revealing of the ark of the covenant (Rev 11:19) is, in a way, the ultimate act that symbolises God's acceptance and forgiveness of those who are on his side.[137] Thus John drives home the point to his readers/hearers that they need to repent earnestly so as to be on the triumphant side in the great cosmological conflict that rages around them.

c. Revelation 14

Neither in Revelation 1 nor Revelation 11 is there clear evidence of anyone outside of the churches being directly called to repent, or actually repenting and turning to worship God instead of his enemies. A far more definite, and indeed potentially universal call to repent, is made in Revelation 14 (though again this is without the use of repentance terminology as such). The first of the three angels that fly over the earth with prophetic messages has "the eternal gospel to proclaim to those dwelling on earth - to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people" (Rev 14:6). He calls those he addresses to fear, glorify and worship God (Rev 14:7). Commentators have differing views as to the content of this "gospel." Beasley-Murray for instance considers it to be the teaching of Jesus.[138] Kiddle does not consider it to be any kind of repentance call for "the angel's eternal gospel was not good news for the inhabitants of earth, at least not the majority of them. It was not a last warning to the wicked."[139] For R H Charles it represents the end of the world and final judgement. It is significant, however, that Charles also finds a repentance function here, for:

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[137]Caird, p. 144.
[138]Beasley-Murray, p. 224.

> It is a proclamation of the impending end of the world and of the final judgement, which, while it is a message of good tidings to the faithful, constitutes for all nations a last summons to repentance.[140]

This passage also enlarges upon John's theology of repentance. In Rev 14:7 the angel cries: "Fear God and give him glory, for the hour of his judgment has come; and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the fountains of water." Those that answer this call, assuming theoretically for a moment that any do, are acknowledging God because of his creatorship and not only out of fear of him as a destroyer.[141] Both positive and negative motivators to heed the call are present, as with the calls to repentance in the letters. The one who heeds the call to fear and glorify God can thus be spared the negative aspect of judgement and be assured of the bounties of his creation. Similar, though more highly defined, pairs of threat and promise motivators are present in the letters to the churches that contain repentance calls, as was shown above (pp. 86-94).

The message proclaimed by the third angel in the group, Rev 14:9-11, builds on the call to repentance in the first message although it takes a more negative approach. "If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on the forehead or hand, he too will drink the wine of God's wrath" (Rev 14:9b-10a). The angel's opening εἴ τις indicates that the threat is possibly conditional. If, however, the third angel addresses the same audience as the first, and his message continues to Rev 14:12[142] there are problems with the universality of the whole call. In theory the message of the

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[139]Kiddle, p. 278.
[140]Charles, ICC Commentary, Vol. II, p 12.
[141]Caird, p. 184.
[142]Beasley-Murray, pp. 225-226; Caird, p. 187.

third angel is universal, as indicated again by the use of εἴ τις, but it would appear that in reality the intended audience is still God's people, the saints of Rev 14:12.[143] These saints are commanded to observe the call to the nations, reject Babylon and witness the fate of the beast and its followers.

As in Revelation 9 and 16 no penitent response from the nations to the three messages is described in the text. No one actually does stop worshipping the beast and no provision is made for those who might do so. No one exhibits fear of the Lord or worships and glorifies God. What is more the reference to Babylon suggests that this is also a call which exhibits Second Exodus characteristics. This would make it a call to God's own people, wayward though they be. The rhetorical situation of the three angels' proclamation, amongst the implied readers at least, is of John addressing those who continue to dabble in Babylonian adultery or tolerate it (as in Pergamum and Sardis) but are still recognisable as God's people.

d. Revelation 18

The theme/motif of Babylon is most clearly revealed in Revelation 18. Here Babylon and its fate is described at length. Various nations have "drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication" and the "kings of the earth have committed fornication with her" (Rev 18:3). This metaphorical description of false religion and rebellion against the authority of God is followed by an impassioned plea from heaven to: "Come out of her, my people, so that you do not take part in her sins, and so that you do not share in her plagues" (Rev 18:4).

There is no doubt that this is a call for people to make a choice of allegiance. The question is who are the 'my people' referred to in the text? Caird takes the position

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[143]Caird. pp. 185-187.

that due to preceding events neither individual martyrs nor the church itself remain in Babylon and thus, "(t)he only inhabitants now left in the great city are those who, through all the premonitory plagues, have obdurately refused to repent". Hence 'my people' are not any who have previously shown any allegiance to God but rather they are God's enemies, "those who before were not his people". [144]

Caird's desire to find a kind of universal redemption, and his holding too literally to the chronology of Babylon's decline and depopulation as described in passages spread throughout the Apocalypse, seems to have drawn him a long way from the rhetorical intent of the text. Other scholars have interpreted the phrase 'my people' with more reference to the rhetorical aims of the book and the author-audience relationship. Hence a strong link is detected between "come out of her, my people" in Rev 18:4 and the messages to the churches in Revelation 2 and 3. Bauckham[145] sees in Rev 18:3-5 a kind of hermeneutical trap for John's implied readers. Its rhetorical intent is to shock God's people out of their complacent alliance with Rome's evils lest they share her guilt and punishment. The tie-in with the messages to the churches, especially the oracle to Thyatira, is a strong one in his view. As well as being an encoded attack upon the world's greatest political and economic power "John's prophecy against Rome could also become a painful and demanding challenge to some of his Christian readers, who needed to 'come out of her.'"[146] Sweet also highlights the connection between the call to 'my people' in Rev 18:4 with the calls made to the churches.[147]

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[144]Ibid., p. 224.

[145]Bauckham, The Climax of Prophecy, pp. 376-377.

[146]Ibid., p. 378.

[147]See Sweet, p. 268. His comment on Rev 18:4 concludes "Moral co-existence with and toleration of the Nicolaitans can only lead to complicity in sin which is about to recoil upon the sinners."

The way in which Babylon is referred to in this passage also helps add weight to the view that it is only God's people that are called out of her and called to abandon her sins (Rev 18:4). Throughout this passage (Rev 18:1-8) Babylon is only ever referred to in the third person. She is not directly addressed or called upon to do anything. No possibility for her to repent is offered. As with Revelation 14 the call made to God's people reflects the type of Second Exodus calls that are made by Jeremiah (Jer 50:8, 51:6, 45) and Isaiah (Isa 48:20, 52:11).[148] Hence, it would seem consistent to understand this call as being primarily for the benefit of John's implied readers.

e. Revelation 21-22

The ultimate destiny of those redeemed from the earth is described in Rev 21:24-22:6. The details of the Edenic vision are inspired by Ezekiel 47, which has an implied universal scope, but the concept of the healing of the nations is definitely John's addition.[149] The final 'call' in the Apocalypse comes in Rev 22:17, "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come.' And let everyone who hears say, 'Come.' And let everyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift." Although, once again, this is not specifically a call to repentance as such and does not use *μετανοεῖν*, it does reflect the calls made in the seven messages of Revelation 2 and 3 in a number of ways.

In Revelation 22 it is again the Spirit who does the calling and the reception of the call is once again specified as being by hearing, as it was in the hearing formula at the end of each letter, for instance Rev 2:7. The reoccurrence of the phrase "let him who hears" also encourages the reader/hearer to believe that these final words are addressed

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[148]Bauckham, The Climax of Prophecy, p. 377; Sweet, p. 268.
[149]Aune, Revelation 17-22, p. 1178; Sweet, p. 308.

to John's 'implied' audience, the seven churches, God's people. Thirst probably represents the desire to repent (as indeed it does in John 6:35). The liturgical nature and eucharistic setting of this final passage has been noted by various commentators.[150] By re-utilising some of the terminology of the repentance calls from the messages in the triumphant setting of Revelation's conclusion John finds yet another way to emphasise the urgent need for re-commitment in his readers.[151] The call here at the end of the Apocalypse is not then so much a call to repentance as a call to eschatological readiness and expectation.[152]

f. Revelation 10

This passage is dealt with out of sequence because it is only a possible repentance reference. Most scholars do not pick up on any reference to repentance or conversion here. It is, however, conceivable that the lack of repentance among the people despite the annihilation of a third of their number, referred to in Rev 9:20-21[153] (on repentance in Revelation 9 see above pp. 126-128), causes the thunders of Rev 10:3-4 to remain un-interpreted. John seems surprised by the command to cease from writing down prophetic information and by the call, "There will be no more delay!" (Rev 10:6). Similar to the situation in the ancient wicked city of Sodom (Genesis 18-19), humanity is here portrayed as beyond repentance and so there is no need to delay just in order to try to save a few more. Fates are sealed and the parousia is ushered in (Rev 10:7), thanks in part to the rejection of this opportunity to repent. So at this point the lack of response to a repentance call helps the narrative to make this transition.

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[150]Guthrie, The Relevance of John's Apocalypse, pp. 88-90; Caird, pp. 286-287; Sweet, p. 318.

[151]Fiorenza points out that it is only in Rev 1:1, 2:16; 3:11 and then in Revelation 22 that the motif of imminent expectation occurs in Revelation. Schüssler Fiorenza, Revelation: Vision of a Just World, p. 115.

[152]Bauckham, The Climax of Prophecy, pp. 167-168.

Bauckham,[154] however, argues that Rev 10:11 is a key text in the issues of conversion in Revelation. In his view it is at this point that an important transition in the use of the phrase "peoples, nations, tongues" occurs. Prior to this it is used to refer to the church as it has been drawn out of the nations. After this point he sees it as being used to mean "the nations" themselves. Bauckham also detects a transition in the function of the church here. It has been drawn out of the nations in order that its suffering might be a witness to them. The messages presented to the churches in Revelation 2-3 are thus given in order to prepare them for this rôle of witnessing to the nations, which they take up from this transition point onwards.[155]

Obviously the end of Revelation 10 is a transitional point in the vision and John has his perspective enlarged by Rev 10:11 and the verses that follow. However, conversion and repentance do not appear to be close to the surface here at all. It is right that the implied reader should experience an expansion of the rôle of the church of Christ as the Apocalypse unfolds. However, the primary rhetorical function of this elevation of perspective is more likely to be a strengthening of resistance to the forces of evil rather than motivating the reader to witness and proselytise. Helpful to Bauckham's argument is his rendering of Rev 10:11 as "you must prophecy about [or <u>to</u>] many peoples"[156], however, most translations limit *ἐπὶ* here to "about" or "concerning".[157]

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[153]On repentance in Revelation 9 see the section above, pp. 126-128.

[154]Bauckham, <u>The Climax of Prophecy</u>, pp. 257-266, especially pp. 265-266.

[155]Ibid., p. 266.

[156]Ibid., 263. His brackets, my underlining. In his following argument, pp 263-266, it is evident that he prefers "to".

[157]E.g. RSV, NASB, TEV, NIV, Phillips, Goodspeed, NRSV, but the NEB is partially supportive of Bauckham with "over".

g. A Possible Occurrence of 'Counter-Repentance'

A thorough examination of the rhetorical function of repentance and conversion narratives in the Apocalypse needs to also consider 'anti-conversions' to the forces of evil and the beast. The clearest occurrence of such an event is found in Revelation 13, especially verse 3, "In amazement the whole earth followed the beast." This chapter focuses on Satan's attempts to imitate or parody the characteristics, actions and authority of God and the Lamb.[158] Its rhetorical function is to warn the reader not to be deceived by these imitations of God and the demonic manifestations of power. Behavioural (Rev 13:6-7) and cryptic (13:18) clues about the identity of the beast and its agents are given to the readers to empower them to resist the temptation to convert to Satan.[159]

The key verb indicating some kind of change of direction or 'conversion' is *θαυμάζειν* (Rev 13:3). The verb is variously translated 'wondered', 'marvelled', 'gaped', 'admired' etc. In this context with the adverb *ὀπίσω*, the idea of following, wandering after, or turning one's head towards is generally understood to be part of John's meaning.[160] Of course the beast cannot truly convert, nor can people repent to it as such. But the concept of it developing a following from the people of the earth, who by implication were not previously following it, is a kind of pseudo-conversion which builds up the theme of deception highlighted in this part of Revelation. Commentators have also seen the connection between the deception achieved by evil forces described in

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[158]As discussed by many commentators, see for instance Bauckham, The Climax of Prophecy, pp. 431-441; and Rowland, Revelation, pp. 113-114.

[159]Revelation 13 has an extensive history of interpretation and influence and the literature dealing with it is vast. For a recent comprehensive survey of hermeneutical views and bibliography see D E Aune, Revelation 6-16, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books, 1998), pp. 713-780.

[160]Most translations included 'followed' or 'wandered' along with a non-movement verb like 'be astonished.' In Jude 16 *θαυμάζειν* carries an idea of flattery.

Revelation 13 and the warnings in the synoptic tradition regarding false Messiahs and false prophets.[161] The repentance discourses in the seven messages also contain warnings regarding those who intend to deceive and lead astray, like Jezebel (Rev 2:20). The narrative of Revelation 13 provides a dramatised encounter with just such a seductive phenomenon and reveals the ultimate source of the deception.

A number of commentators agree that Rev 13:3 refers not to forced emperor worship as such but rather the manner in which it was economically and socially advantageous and therefore an attractive proposition to wavering Christians.[162] Nevertheless, the second half of Revelation 13 points to a much more sinister and oppressive imposition of the Imperial cult which had already on occasion shown its tendency to clash violently with Christianity.[163] John is intent that his readers take note of the warning signs and make their allegiance to Christ sure.

h. Analysis of Non-*μετανοεῖν* Repentance Passages

Clearly a number of authors find repentance occurring, being sought, or being a potential outcome of events in the narrative of the Apocalypse. Schüssler Fiorenza summarises this view thus:

> It is crucial to recognize that Revelation's rhetoric of judgement expresses hope for the conversion of nine-tenths of the nations in response to Christian witness and preaching. Otherwise, one will not

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[161]Schüssler Fiorenza, Revelation: Vision of a Just World, pp. 48-49.

[162]For example Caird, p. 166; Rowland, Revelation, p. 113; see also A Y Collins, The Apocalypse, pp 90-94.

[163]Aune, Revelation 6-16, pp. 773-780. See also the sections below on Emperor worship and martyrdom, pp. 149-152.

> understand that the author advocates a theology of justice rather than a theology of hate and resentment.[164]

Likewise Krodel finds motivation in the text to inspire the reader to missionary activity as they witness how Christ "through the tiny church . . . saves nine tenths of the city."[165] This is also a primary focus of Bauckham's chapter "The Conversion of the Nations".[166]

On the other hand there are those scholars who take the radically opposite view that:

> . . . there is in the book of Revelation no indication of the repentance of the wicked. On the contrary, the judgements of God only serve to confirm the wicked in their wickedness (9:20; 16:9, 11).[167]

From the contemporary perspective, that is, the way in which Revelation probably needs to be read today, Schüssler Fiorenza's perspective is a pertinent one. However, the original rhetorical purpose of these narratives is highly likely to have been restricted to the persuasion of the implied readers, (the Christians of John's community), to repent themselves rather than to inspire them to overt missionary activity. What is more, just what constitutes a 'theology of justice' (to use Schüssler Fiorenza's term), and the perceived rôle of the church are likely to have changed radically since the late first century. What is to be found in the text itself is that John is very concerned that his readers are not deceived by the powers of the beast. His rhetorical strategy is designed to alert them to the dangers of such deception and the eternal consequences of repenting or not repenting. The repentance calls are made primarily to turn them away from the

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[164]Schüssler Fiorenza, Revelation: Vision of a Just World, p. 79.

[165]Krodel, p. 228.

[166]Bauckham, The Climax of Prophecy, pp. 238-337. His understanding of the matter is encapsulated in such statements as, "God's kingdom will come . . . by the repentance of the nations as a result of the church's witness", p. 258.

[167]Ladd, Commentary, p 29.

world. They are not yet confirmed enough in their belief or practice to be of much use as witnesses. That rôle is given to supernatural beings, e.g. Rev 11:3f, Rev 14:6f.

This thesis, however, will go on to explore the history of influence of the rhetoric of Revelation's repentance calls, specifically that of the Laodicean message. Therefore it needs to be conceded that the readings of Bauckham, Schüssler Fiorenza and others on the theology of repentance of Revelation are appropriate for contemporary Christianity. Because of its place in society and the historical legacy that it has accumulated since the composition of the Apocalypse, the modern church can legitimately have a more universal soteriology and hence benefit from more missiological readings of the text. But the analysis of the *μετανοεῖν* and non-*μετανοεῖν* passages above shows that this is not John's prime repentance-related concern for his implied readers.

## E. The Focus of John's Repentance Call: Rome, Paul, Satan or Self?

The question still remains, does the command *μετανοεῖν* relate to socio-political action as well a spiritual change? Is it a call to 'turn away' from a specific social practice or a belief system rather than, or as well as, a call to 'repent' of personal sins and bad behaviour, in the way that repentance might be generally understood by Christians today?

The focus of this thesis is more on the methods that John uses to persuade the reader to repent, rather than what he calls them to repent from. However, for the sake of context and continuity a brief discussion of this issue and its treatment by contemporary scholars needs to be made here. (It has also been touched on slightly above, pp. 61f.) Associated with this are the questions of martyrdom, heresy and emperor worship in

Revelation. All of these have received considerable academic attention and rightly continue to do so as important themes in the Apocalypse. The basic position is as follows.

## 1. Emperor Worship and Idolatry

Research on this popular subject has enabled work on the seven letters to engage with classical history, the study of early Christianity and Judaism, and work on this important theme as it occurs in the rest of Revelation. Kraybill, L L Thompson, Klauck and others have persuasively argued that the background of emperor worship is one of, or maybe even the primary, negative motivation for Revelation.[168] Of course Charles argued for the same, but the modern approach integrates the evidence of the seven messages into the theme as opposed to excluding it from the emperor worship debate, which Charles virtually did.[169] Other studies examine the actual practice of the emperor cult in the seven cities of Asia Minor, as described in ancient sources and the archaeological record, and compare it with what is implied in Revelation 2-3.[170]

There is no doubt that the emperor cult would have been a very powerful symbol of Roman/pagan culture and that it informs many of the negative symbols and motifs throughout Revelation. A Christian with John's cosmic vision and political awareness could not have failed to be concerned about its far-reaching influence at the end of the first century. As Bauckham puts it:

> John was concerned . . . about the victory of God over the forces of evil as they manifested themselves in his contemporary world. The oppressive

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[168]Kraybill, *passim*; L L Thompson, pp. 171-201; H-J Klauck, "Das Sendschreiben nach Pergamon und der Kaiserkult in der Johannes-offenbarung", Biblica 73 (1992): 153-182.

[169]See discussion on Charles' treatment of the letters above, p. 52.

> power of Rome, the imperial cult, the corrupt civilization of Rome are all portrayed in a series of vivid images . . .[171]

These images in the letters, such as Satan's seat (Rev 2:13), help to establish the emperor cult as one of the most virulent forms of pagan influence from which John's readers are strongly encouraged to turn away for the sake of their eternal salvation. Calls made later in the book to "come out of her my people" (Rev 18:4) are likewise rhetorically assisted by vivid negative imagery informed by Roman elements.

## 2. Martyrdom and Persecution

Persecution has been a fraught issue in Revelation studies. It was assumed for many years that there was a significant background of real persecution in the seven churches,[172] and/or signs that society was about to turn violently on Christians.[173] (See also the discussion above on the sociological analysis of the Revelation 2-3, pp. 61-64.) However, scholarly opinion has now swung away from that position. The contemporary view is summarised by A Y Collins who believes that Revelation:

> . . . cannot be understood as a response to a new initiative against the Christians taken by Roman authorities. . . . it was written to awaken and intensify Christian exclusiveness, particularly vis-à-vis the imperial cult.[174]

Collins goes on to say that the imperial cult was not really much of a problem for the Christians of Asia Minor until John essentially made it a test of genuine Christian

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[170]P Botha, "God, Emperor Worship and Society: Contemporary Experience and the Book of Revelation", Neotestamentica 22 (1988): 87-102; also Hemer, *passim*.

[171]Bauckham, The Climax of Prophecy, p.185. Most commentators find imperial symbolism throughout Revelation. See for example, Schüssler Fiorenza on the link between the king of the locust in Rev 9:11 and Domitian, Revelation: Vision of a Just World, pp. 71-72.

[172]Ramsay, Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia, pp. 98-110.

[173]Kiddle, pp. *xxxvi-xliii*.

[174]A Y Collins, Crisis and Catharsis, pp. 73-74.

commitment. In fact he wrote in order "to point out a crisis that many of them did not perceive." At Laodicea, for instance, the church experiences so little tension between Roman society and themselves that they are totally compromised, hence they are condemned and called to repent *en masse* by John.[175] This view became the majority view,[176] and is to be found expressed in broader works on the New Testament.[177] However, as noted above, there are dissenting voices who do see actual persecution at work in the Christian communities of Asia Minor.[178]

M G Reddish incorporates the whole of Revelation in her study of the martyrdom issue.[179] However, the martyrdom of Antipas, a member of the Pergamum church, mentioned in Rev 2:13 and the warning of persecution to Smyrna in Rev 2:10 means that the letters play a significant part in the debate. Obviously the Antipas incident is important for the understanding of persecution and martyrdom. It is rhetorically significant that despite the fact that his death was some time in the past, Antipas is the only person, other than himself, that John mentions by his proper name in the entire Apocalypse.[180]

One martyr may not make a pogrom but the death by martyrdom of an individual who has been personally known to the community is a sobering event and John utilises this in his attempts to shake his readers from their complacency or

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[175]Ibid., p. 77.

[176]For instance, Kraybill, p. 56.

[177]D E Aune, The New Testament in its Literary Environment (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 1987), p. 245. Aune believes that John perceived a crisis, but that it was spiritual rather than political.

[178]See Slater *passim*, and also Schüssler Fiorenza, Revelation: Vision of a Just World, pp. 53-57.

[179]M G Reddish, "Martyr Christology in the Apocalypse", Journal for the Study of the New Testament 33 (1988): 85-95.

[180]Bauckham, The Climax of Prophecy, p. 171. Aune states that Antipas was "doubtless a historical figure", Revelation 1-5, p. 148.

compromise. Whatever the actual levels of historical persecution were or had been, rhetorically speaking it is one of the factors that John uses to try to spiritually focus and revive his audience. The Antipas incident and the harassment at Philadelphia are not mentioned for the sake of news or social comment but as part of John's programme of spiritual purification of his community.[181] What is more a lack of actual persecution hardly reduces the need for repentance calls to be made.

### 3. The Heretics within the Seven Churches

The named, or nick-named, heretics of the letters, the Nicolaitans (Rev 2:6, 15), Balaam (Rev 2:14) and Jezebel (Rev 2:20), have always attracted considerable academic interest. Harnack, for example, explored the links between the Nicolaitan heretics and Nicolaus of Jerusalem.[182] He concluded that they were in fact Satanists.[183] Räisänen's careful study of the Nicolaitans incorporates as much additional information concerning them as it is possible to glean from the rest of the New Testament and the Church Fathers. He concludes that "John and the Nicolaitans represent two different types of Christianity which . . . exemplify the religious and theological diversity of early Christianity."[184] Jezebel is seen by a number of writers as a provocative image with potentially misogynistic overtones.[185] The tendency to portray these heretical groups and individuals as Paulinists has softened (see next section) and a number of authors have

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[181] As Slater points out, "If these letters had been written primarily to tell us something about the wider social milieu, why is it that there is so little about Roman Asian society in them?", p. 241.

[182] A Von Harnack, "The Sect of the Nicolaitans and Nicolaus, the Deacon of Jerusalem". Journal of Religion 3 (1923): 413-422.

[183] Ibid., p. 415.

[184] H Räisänen, "The Nicolaitans: Apoc. 2; Acta 6". Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt Part II, Vol. 26.2 (1995), p. 1640.

[185] See for instance T Pippin, "Jezebel Re-Vamped". Semeia 69-70 (1995): 221-233; P B Duff, "I Will Give to Each of You as Your Works Deserve: Witchcraft Accusations and the Fiery-Eyed Son of God in Rev 2:18-23". New Testament Studies 43 (1997): 116-133.

considered the possibilities that the Nicolaitans may have represented a Gnostic threat to John's community.[186]

The relationship between the letters, their named heretics and subsequent historical heretical movements such as Montanism have also been explored.[187] Trevett perceives a close association between the Montanist heresy and the church in Philadelphia. She argues that there is evidence for this in the Philadelphian letter (Rev 3:7-13).[188] Kraybill takes the labels John gives to the heretics in the churches as a departure point for a comparative analysis with other heretics and heterodox groups to be found in the rest of the New Testament and contemporary sources.[189] Other references to Revelation 2-3 occur in general studies on heresy in the early church[190].

From a rhetorical perspective it is advantageous for a writer or preacher to use examples of the kind of behaviour that he/she is attempting to draw people away from. These operate most effectively if they come from within the presupposition pool common to author and reader. Whoever the Nicolaitans were it is evident that a power struggle over prophetic, interpretive and spiritual power was developing or had developed within the Christian churches for whom John believed himself to be the moral authority and oracle of God.[191] By vilifying specified heretics and investing them with

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[186]See Aune's succinct summary of research and opinion, Revelation 1-5, pp. 148-149.

[187]K A Fox, "The Nicolaitans, Nicolas and the Early Church", Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses 23 (1994): 465-496.

[188]C Trevett, "Apocalypse, Ignatius, Montanism: Seeking the Seeds", Vigiliae Christianae 43 (1989): 313-338.

[189]Kraybill, pp. 38-56.

[190]W Bauer, Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity (London: SCM Press, 1972), has a whole chapter on heresy in Asia Minor, informed largely by Revelation 2-3, pp. 77-94. (This is an English translation of an earlier work.)

[191]On the ecclesiastical power struggle that might lie behind John's attacks on Jezebel and the Nicolaitans see Schüssler Fiorenza, Revelation: Visions of a Just World, pp. 132-139. For the possibility of a Judaeo-Christian conflict see the discussion in Sweet, pp. 28-31.

pre-set characteristics via nick-names, John uses a negative form of the Aristotelian 'means' of rhetoric described as "ethos".[192]

John's identification of the 'false' prophetess at Thyatira as Jezebel is part of this deliberate rhetorical choice. The associations connected with that name put him in juxtaposition with her and compel the reader to take sides. Siding with him and Christ in accordance with the spiritual and behavioural criteria set by the text constitutes repentance. As Caird puts it:

> It is John's role to play Elijah to this woman's Jezebel. Just as Elijah on Mount Carmel accused Israel of limping on two opinions . . . and compelled them to decide which of the two was truly God, so John demands that the church shall choose between Christ and Caesar.[193]

**4. <u>Enemies Within and Without: Paul or Rome?</u>**

There is no doubt that early Christianity faced internal conflicts, particularly between those who felt a need for the retention of the Jewish ceremonial law and those who espoused a more liberal conciliatory religion. Over the years a number of writers have seen Pauline Christianity as the main enemy 'within' and it is therefore this that is being attacked by John in the seven letters and even other parts of Revelation. Thus "we conclude that Nicolaitanism was an antinomian movement whose antecedents can be traced in the misrepresentation of Pauline liberty . . ."[194] Likewise Heiligenthal has explored the possible identity of the Nicolaitans. In his analysis they are tolerant liberals influenced by Paul's theology and thus perceived as a threat by John and his followers

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[192]Aristotelian rhetorical forms and methods are discussed above pp. 70-71.
[193]Caird, p. 45. Caird does not see this in rhetorical terms.
[194]Hemer, p. 94.

who were far more conservative.[195] Rowland also sees here a thinly veiled polemic against Pauline theology.[196]

If one of the Nicolaitans/Jezebel heresies was eating meat offered to idols[197] (see Rev 2:20), then there is of course a more specific link with Pauline praxis than general antinomianism. This had been an issue for the Corinthian Christians a generation earlier (1 Cor 8:7-13 and 10:20-21). Evidently tension over this issue in early Christianity continued into the next generation. However, although Paul's influence is still felt, in certain questions of practice, the calls to repent that John makes are exhortations against cultural accommodations of a number of different types. His main concern is the evil and seductive influence of the dominant culture which is pagan Rome and more specifically its rapidly developing cult of emperor worship.[198]

Repentance in the letters is from pagan influences of any kind, whether influenced by Pauline theology or not, and from giving one's allegiance to any prophetic voice other than John's.[199] John perceives his congregations aligning themselves into three basic positions; firstly the liberal compromisers such as Jezebel, who can be almost anywhere on the spectrum of heresy - from temple prostitutes to eaters of idol-sacrificed

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[195]R Heiligenthal, "Wer waren die 'Nikolaiten'? Ein Beitrag zur Theologiegeschichte des frühen Christentums", Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft 82 (1991): 133-137; likewise U B Müller, Die Offenbarung des Johannes (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1984), pp. 96-99.

[196]C Rowland, Christian Origins: An Account of the Setting and Character of the most Important Messianic Sect of Judaism Second Edition (London: SPCK, 1987), p. 262.

[197]See Aune, Revelation 1-5, pp. 148-149; Metzger, p. 35. Räisänen, believes that it was their only 'heresy', "The Nicolaitans", pp. 1617-1619

[198]For further discussion on this see P Coutsoumpos, "The Social Implications of Idolatry in Revelation 2:14: Christ or Caesar?", Biblical Theological Bulletin 27 (1997): 23-27, which summarises the debate on the competing heretical factors in John's community.

[199]Schnelle, pp. 532-534, perceives the use of *διδαχή* in the Thyatiran letter as indicating a deep-seated doctrinal power struggle within the community.

meat; secondly those tolerant of the liberals and pagans (including Laodicea); and thirdly those that John believes are his allies but are nevertheless in danger of being misled.[200]

Ultimately, and particularly in the Laodicean oracle, John lifts the concept of repentance and overcoming beyond earth-bound corrupting influences such as Roman society, emperor worship or even Pauline liberalism. These things are certainly part of the agenda that John presents to his implied readers, but the repentance calls are not so specific as to prevent them being applied to more general sins.[201] Nor have they been so culturally or doctrinally specific as to prevent them from being used for revival and repentance by other interpretive communities who faced very different issues, as an analysis of the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the Laodicean repentance call clearly shows. (See below, chapters Four and Five.) In attempting to persuade his readers to repent John's ultimate rhetorical example is not Jezebel, Balaam, himself or even Antipas, but Christ.

## F. Conclusions on Repentance in Revelation

Although John has a concern with the issue of repentance and conversion, the focus of that concern is centred on the Christian community that he addresses – his implied audience. Indeed, in the Apocalypse "the repentance required is not an initial act, but a challenge to reform their Christian way of life."[202] Guthrie believes that Rev 9:20-21 shows that the plagues were intended to have a beneficial effect and that repentance is an important theme in Revelation: "It is highly significant that, in a book

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[200]Expanded from categories suggested by Aune, The New Testament in Its Literary Environment, pp. 244-245.

[201]Bauckham, The Theology of the Book of Revelation, pp. 144-146.

[202]D Guthrie, New Testament Theology (Leicester: Inter Varsity Press, 1981), p. 601.

which says so much about coming judgement, repentance, as a demand of God to men, should have so prominent a place."[203]

However, from the analysis above it is clear that whilst repentance and rejection of pagan compromise are still possible and desirable in John's community, time and opportunities are rapidly running out. Despite the fact that the theology of the Apocalypse allows for the theoretical possibility for people to repent, no one in the nations does actually go so far as to have a change of heart, despite giving God glory and acknowledgement (as has been shown above). What is more the time for his own community to make their ultimate choice has arrived, the end is upon them.

John evidently saw himself and his community as being so near to the eschaton that it was too late to become actively involved in any mission to call the world to repentance. This was now the territory of heavenly messengers, such as those in Revelation 14. By and large, calls have been made and decisions taken before the time that the book opens. The acts of repentance that John calls for, and wants to witness, are within the churches in his circuit where individuals and groups have slipped from their previously righteous positions. Specific sins, practices and false allegiances are rhetorically exposed so that the reader is in no doubt as to what is expected. Hence the model for the typology of his call is the second Exodus out of Babylon as it is in much of Jesus' kingdom teaching and his symbolic actions.[204] John is preaching to the choir but it is a choir that is well off key.

This is not to say that Revelation is deterministic, or lacks conditionalist thinking on the matter of repentance. Nor can it be categorically said that John did not try to

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[203]Ibid.

[204]N T Wright, Jesus and the Victory of God (London: SPCK, 1996), pp. 428-430 and 168f.

inspire a sense of mission in his community. In fact an enormous amount of missionary activity and evangelistic fervour within contemporary Christianity has been, and still is, inspired specifically by the book of Revelation.[205] This alone would make it hard to prove that evangelism is totally absent from John's authorial intent. However, it has to be conceded that despite the apparently universal call of Rev 14:6-7, repentance in Revelation is essentially an internal affair. Calls to repentance are calls for revival and reformation within the Christian community, that is, a cleansing of pagan, gnostic and possibly Pauline influences. John's mission was thus primarily one of in-reach, not out-reach. This is reflected in the relationship to the Laodicean letter that was experienced by both of the interpretive communities which will be examined in Chapters Four and Five of this thesis.

Finally, whether the seven letters are read from the perspective of a particular church, as latter-day Laodiceans have done (see Chapter Four) and still do (see Chapter Five), or if one identifies with them as aspects of one's spiritual journey, does not affect the effectiveness of the recurring repentance motifs strategy that has been examined above, pp. 103-124. John's rhetorical purpose is to make his readers, both communal and individual, repent and/or remain righteous. The *leitmotifs* assist these calls to repentance no matter where the implied, or real readers, identify themselves or their particular community within the narrative hierarchy. From a rhetorical perspective the Apocalypse efficiently builds a sense of guilt, urgency and terror in its readers which combine to persuade them that repentance really is the wisest choice.

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[205]Examples of this will be shown in Chapter Five, in the interpretation of the seven churches by the Seventh-day Adventist church.

John anticipates three types of reader, spiritually speaking. The righteous readers are warned of the potential results produced by slipping into sin, pagan compromise or complacency. Wayward readers are persuaded by promises of glory and threats of painful punishment. And the lukewarm readers, or those concerned they might be compromised in some way, will be receptive to all aspects of the strategy. The reader is encouraged, and rhetorically persuaded, to doubt his or her own spiritual standing, and driven to increased commitment and righteous deeds by the 'carrot and stick' strategy of Revelation's promises and threats and their associated *leitmotifs*.

# Chapter Three

## Models and Background of the Laodicean Repentance Call

### A. Introduction

The central question that this thesis hopes to answer is: how do the literary dynamics of John's Apocalypse seek to elicit repentance from the reader? One aspect of this question involves an examination of the models for, and background of, the repentance calls upon which John draws. A whole range of cultural, literary, linguistic and theological presuppositions exist in the author/audience dynamic that gives rise to any piece of literature or utterance. Hence in immediate first audience discourse:

> My utterance successfully conveys much more than I actually say because I share with my hearer a 'Presupposition Pool' which contains information constituted from the situative context . . . as well as the new information from the completed part of the discourse itself.[1]

Revelation is no exception, and such presuppositions are more crucial for this work than for many others.[2] This chapter will undertake an exploration of the literary background to the call to repentance in the Laodicean message. It will particularly examine John's use of the 'Disputation Speech' model found in the Hebrew prophets

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[1]P Cotterell and M Turner, Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1989), p. 90.

[2]In fact Cotterell and Turner use examples from the Laodicean letter to illustrate the significance of presupposition pools in biblical interpretation, pp. 95-97.

and his literary relationship with the progenitor of Christian 'repentance preaching' - John the Baptist.

The material of the letters has only occasionally entered the extensive academic debate that has tackled Revelation's dependence, both linguistic and thematic, on the Old Testament and its inter-dependence or lack thereof with the New Testament. David Hill, for instance points out that the 'call to hear' formula, (*ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις*), at the end of each letter has parallels in the Synoptic Gospels.[3] Also the phrase which starts each letter, *τάδε λέγει*, corresponds to the Old Testament prophet's frequent declaration 'thus saith the Lord.' By starting each letter in this way John "would conjure up in a worshipping congregation the fear and trembling associated with standing before God and hearing his awesome words of judgement and warning."[4] Besides this, however, the seven messages have been considered to be remarkably free from strict dependence on the features of any biblical or classical literary forms.[5]

In the discussion concerning the extent of the Semitic nature of Revelation's language, the letters are only infrequently brought into the debate. Stephen Thompson's The Apocalypse and Semitic Syntax makes no use of Revelation 2-3 at all.[6] It has long been thought that the Greek of Revelation 2-3 is better than that of the rest of the book.[7] The agenda that Thompson and others set was quite precise and does not deny the influence of the Old Testament on the letters, just its Semitic language - and then only by

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[3]D Hill, pp. 76f.

[4]Minear, p. 43.

[5]Karrer, pp.159-160; Aune, Revelation 1-5, pp. 124-126.

[6]S W Thompson, The Apocalypse and Semitic Syntax, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series, 52 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). The same is true of K G C Newport, "Semitic Influence in Revelation", Bible Translator Technical Papers 37 (1986): 328-334.

a *via negativa*. By working backwards from this perspective their work probably confirms the view that the Greek of the letters is, technically at least, less Semitic.

Work on the Old Testament influence/background of Revelation 2-3 has mainly taken the form of the listings of Old Testament "quotations," inferences and paraphrase that many commentators hand down from one to another. The most recent monograph on the subject has taken a more creative approach, however. Moyise explores John's creative, interactive use of Old Testament material and focuses on the rôle of the reader and intertextuality.[8]

## 1. Genre and Role

It is widely acknowledged that John of Patmos saw himself in a prophetic role[9], in the line of Old Testament prophets such as Moses and Ezekiel. "At every turn and in every possible way John strives earnestly to portray himself as a prophet of the classical school, without forfeiting his Christian heritage."[10] Thus in terms of function, at least, Revelation is intended by its author to be prophecy.[11] Although Revelation is heavily influenced and dependent on the Hebrew Bible, John is not slavishly dependent on any literature or literary style. Rather he is able to control his sources in order to achieve his purpose. As Schüssler Fiorenza has said, John "reworks traditional material into a new

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[7]Feuillet, p. 35. See also the discussion of Ramsay's view of the literary merits of the seven letters, above p. 46.

[8]S Moyise, The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series, 115 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995). Moyise deals specially with the Old Testament in the seven letters on pp. 24-44.

[9]D Hill, pp. 70-93; Ford, Revelation, p. 28; C Rowland, Radical Christianity (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), p. 82; among others.

[10]Mazzaferri, p. 374.

[11]D Hill, pp. 75-76 and 90-91; Mazzaferri, pp. 259-378, and M E Boring, "The Apocalypse as Christian Prophecy", Society of Biblical Literature 1974 Seminar Papers, Vol. II (1974): 53-55, etc. For an opposing view see G von Rad, Old Testament Theology, Vol. II (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1965), pp. 301-308.

and unique literary composition."[12] Mazzaferri shows that John is no mere redactor of Old Testament material, but rather a highly creative author.[13]

Some writers on Revelation have sought to show that John's purpose differs from that of previous Judaeo-Christian writers, pointing out that this is demonstrated in his unique writing style.[14] This is not the main focus of this study but it is obvious that source material and genre contribute to both function and reader expectation. (See also the discussion of genre criticism of Revelation, above pp. 66-70). It might be helpful for us to think, therefore, of John combining the effects of two familiar genres (prophecy and apocalyptic) in order to elicit a desired response from the readers/hearers of his work. John's ability to combine genres is highlighted by David Aune who calls Revelation a '*mixtum compositum*' and a 'prophetic apocalypse'."[15]

John develops his call to repentance from the models and examples of various Old Testament prophets, and possibly some proto-Christian ones as well. He "re-sounds the call of the prophets to repentance and justice,"[16] as Fiorenza puts it. The questions that will be tackled here are, which models and examples does he follow, why has he selected those in particular, and how does he rework their style and message to fit into his unique document, and thereby persuade his readers to make the desired responses?

## 2. New Testament Background

The concept of repentance in Revelation occurs within the context of early Christian belief and practice. John would have made certain assumptions about his

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[12]Schüssler Fiorenza, "Revelation," in Epp and MacRae, p. 417.

[13]Mazzaferri, pp. 36-47 and 194-196. A point supported by Moyise's research.

[14]According to Mazzaferri, Revelation has no strict generic identity, but is uniquely 'neo-classical prophecy,' pp. 377-378. Hill is more cautious but still considers Revelation to be a unique literary form, D Hill, p. 93. Similarly Ford, Revelation, pp. 26-28.

[15]Aune, Revelation 1-5, p. *lxxxix*. See also his discussion of Revelation's genre, pp. *lxx-xc*.

readers' theological understanding. His choice of literary style for the work as a whole and the main source of literary material indicates that he assumes a strong Old Testament background amongst his readers. From what has been seen above it is evident that John's implied audience, and most likely, the actual first audience, was almost exclusively Christian,[17] no matter how compromised by paganism and apathy. John would have been able to assume that when he called for repentance his readership knew roughly what was expected of them. This means that he does not need to spell out a theological explanation of the individual or communal process of repentance.

Repentance is a vital element in the process of redemption which is a prime theme of the New Testament. The kerygma of primitive Christianity always includes an appeal for repentance.[18] The New Testament stresses the fact that repentance is a response to God's call to holiness. Although not contradicting the Hebrew Bible's understanding of repentance, the New Testament stresses a more individualised experience with less emphasis on corporate repentance such as is found in 1 Chron 7:14. This is done first in the preaching of John the Baptist and the teaching of Jesus and then through the preaching of the Apostles as it is recorded in Acts and the Pauline letters. Theologically repentance is an "integral initial part in the experience of salvation."[19] Though it is not sufficient for salvation in itself it is closely linked, and is a faith engendered response to God's calling and Christ's example. However repentance is not conversion, but rather a change of attitudes, morals and beliefs (1 Thess 1:9). Importantly it must lead to a demonstration of new behaviour (Acts 26:20).

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[16]Schüssler Fiorenza. "Revelation", in Epp and MacRae. p. 419.
[17]As most commentators agree. e.g. Sweet. p. 189.
[18]Ladd. Theology. p. 365.
[19]Guthrie. New Testament Theology. p. 575.

The progenitor of New Testament repentance is of course the Baptist (below, pp. 169-185). Where he differed from Old Testament thinking was in seeing repentance as not only a return to obedience to the law but also a change of thought.[20] The Baptist sought for a change in the individual's disposition, self judgement and evaluation of God's claim on the life. This would result in changes of behaviour and he demands of his audience that they "bear fruit worthy of repentance" (Matt 3:8).

Luke's Jesus divides society into two classes, the repentant and the non-repentant. Non-repentance leads to death (Luke 16:30). Repentance is a pre-requisite for becoming part of the kingdom of God but equally the community of believers must extend forgiveness to the repentant with the same rapidity and totality as God does (Luke 17:1ff). According to Ladd Jesus expands the concept of repentance, from that held by the prophets and the Baptist, by adding the notion that the call of repentance is, "a call to respond to the divine invitation."[21]

John and Jesus emphasise the notion of turning, and occasionally use *ἐπιστρέφειν* in a theological sense (e.g. Matt 13:15). Turning away from sin is repentance, turning to God is conversion. One follows the other completing an arc of 180 degrees, as it were. Another way of expressing how repentance and conversion complement each other is to say that repentance is a process whilst conversion is an event. N T Wright points out that Jesus' teaching on repentance frequently has 'return from exile' elements as well as links with eschatology.[22] "'Repentance' in Jesus' context

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[20]Ibid., pp. 574-575.
[21]Ladd, Theology, p. 82.
[22]Wright, pp. 246f.

. . . would have carried the connotations of 'what Israel must do if YHWH is to restore her fortunes at last.'"[23]

Surprisingly repentance does not really occur in the Fourth Gospel. However, Acts is close to the Synoptics it its treatment of the theme. Luke builds on Jesus and the Baptist by adding the idea that repentance is a gift from God (Acts 5:31), and it is here that it is first encountered as part of the process of redemption for Gentiles (11:18). The necessity of repentance due to the impending judgement is a feature of Paul's sermon in Athens (Acts 17:30). Also in Acts, and vital to the Pauline view, genuine repentance should be proved and attested to via deeds worthy of it, "and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds" (Acts 26:20). In Acts "repentance was considered a '*sine qua non*' for admission into the Christian church."[24] However, it occurs later without reference to baptism.

In the whole Pauline corpus *μετάνοια* occurs only four times and *μετανοεῖν* only once. Writing to specific, established Christian communities means he has something in common with John the Seer. Thus in 2 Cor 12:21 Paul observes that some of the Corinthian members have not repented of sins. The community is therefore split between the repentant and non-repentant as they are in Sardis (Rev 3:1-6) or Pergamum (2:12-17).

Because he is writing to Christians, the repentance that Paul calls for follows their initial conversion experience but still precedes conversion in the current sequence of returning to a right relationship with God. Thus "repentance for Paul was an ongoing

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[23]Ibid., p. 249.
[24]Guthrie, New Testament Theology, p. 588.

necessity wherever sin has marred the individual's life and witness."[25] The same goes for John's understanding and teaching in Revelation 2-3. A good example of this ongoing approach to repentance is the call to repent given to Ephesus, "repent and do the works you first did" (Rev 2:5).

Paul also believes that Christians can influence others to repent and that God's kindness should produce repentance (Rom 2:4). Building on the idea of repentance being necessary for joining the community, Paul regards it as essential "for continuing in full fellowship of the redeemed community."[26] This notion is shared by John, for example in the message to Laodicea where lack of repentance will result in emetic expulsion from the presence of Christ (Rev 3:16-19).

Hebrews introduces the concept that for some there is no possibility of a chance to repent after apostasy, Esau is given as an Old Testament example of this (Heb 12:17). Those persistent sinners who "are crucifying the Son of God all over again" (Heb 6:6), also fall into this category. More positively, in Hebrews repentance is described as a prerequisite for a share of the Spirit.

Throughout the rest of the New Testament therefore there is a development of the idea of repentance that is more or less free of tension or contradiction in its theology between one writer and another. The theology of repentance in Revelation fits in to this schema quite smoothly.

Although it may not be completely legitimate to talk about a 'theology' of repentance in Revelation, thus far it has been shown that John does give it certain distinct features. Repentance is stimulated and enhanced by recalling former spiritual

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[25]Ibid., p. 590.
[26]Ibid.

achievements (Rev 2:5 and 3:3). It is called for within a time framework which is rapidly expiring. Hence the urgency of Rev 2:16, and the phrase "I am about to" of 3:16.[27] However, time and opportunity to repent is definitely given to some, such as Jezebel. Neither does a response have to come instantaneously upon the issuing of the call to repent (Rev 2:21). Importantly for the issue of determinism and free will, calls to repentance are resistible (Rev 2:21, 9:20-21 and 16:9-11).

It has already been shown how closely repentance in Revelation is related to Christlikeness, (above p. 105) and Rev 3:19 reveals that Christ's motivation for making the call is love and concern for his errant children. If Ladd is right about Jesus developing Judaism's idea of repentance to include the response to a divine invitation, then it is clearly evident that the Seer follows that lead via the invitational supper motif in the Laodicean pericope.

### 3. Repentance Preaching

As has been shown above (see p. 86), five out of the seven letters to the churches include calls to repentance; Ephesus (Rev 2:5), Pergamum (2:16); Thyatira (2:22); Sardis (3:3), and Laodicea (3:19). The Laodicean letter (Rev 3:14-22) contains probably the strongest call to repentance in the whole of Revelation (above pp. 94f). It will be this repentance call that will be particularly focused on in this chapter. In his Prophetie und Predigt im Neuen Testament Ulrich Müller[28] has suggested that the letter to Laodicea (as well as Ephesus, Pergamum and Thyatira) conforms to the classical prophetic pattern known as "repentance preaching." Müller uses the term *Bußpredigt*.

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[27] Although *μέλλειν* can denote the certainty of a future event without necessarily indicating imminence. Bauer, "*μέλλω*," cites Rev 3:16 specifically under the meaning "be on the point of."

[28] U B Müller, Prophetie und Predigt im Neuen Testament (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1975), pp. 57-104.

According to Müller repentance preaching in the Judeo-Christian tradition conforms to a simple structure as follows:

i. verdict on community

ii. exhortation to remember and repent

iii. a conditional threat of judgement

The Seer also shares the same purpose and concerns of previous prophets. As David Hill has noted in New Testament Prophecy, "He spoke to warn, judge, appeal (for repentance) and to encourage."[29] Müller demonstrates that John's potential sources for this pattern of repentance preaching include John the Baptist, (Matt 3:7-10 and parallels), and the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah (Jer 7:3-15). Both of these potential sources for models of John's repentance calls will now be explored.

## B. The Baptist

Upon close examination there are a remarkable number of parallels between the Laodicean letter and the repentance preaching of John the Baptist.[30] The call to repent, in the sense of a return to a truth or piety once abandoned, rather than Gentile conversion from paganism, changes of mind or alterations in world-view, is associated most strongly in the New Testament with the Baptist. Repentance preaching in early Christianity would naturally have owed something to the Baptist. Relatively speaking repentance is a far more prominent theme in John's message than in Jesus' (though of course the New Testament dedicates far less actual space to the Baptist). What is more, a number of Jesus' disciples were first the disciples of John (John 1:35-37). It has also

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[29]D Hill, p. 84.

been argued that Jesus was a disciple of John prior to having his own following, in which case he would have been able to assimilate directly the Baptist's preaching methods and apocalyptic world view.[31] Thus the Baptist's preaching style and themes were incorporated into Christian homiletic tradition via this and other routes.[32]

## 1. Literary Connections

Links between the Baptist and the Apocalypse have been seen before. A strong literary relationship between the two is espoused in the Anchor Bible commentary on Revelation by J Massyngberde Ford. She has suggested that Revelation, or at least parts of it, began life as the prophecies of the Baptist and his school.[33] However, Ford considers the messages of Revelation 2 and 3 to have been added to the Apocalypse at a later date by a Jewish-Christian redactor who only had connection with a later Baptist community.[34] As the Baptist hypothesis is Ford's central concern it is not surprising that she gives less attention to those sections of Revelation considered to be later additions.

This is a pity as it is within one such section, the letters, that most of the calls to repent are found in Revelation. In fact, as demonstrated in Chapter Two above the letters contain the only calls to repentance that have a possibility of being responded to in the Apocalypse. As the call to repent is central to what is known of the Baptist's message (i.e. from the Gospels, Acts and Josephus) this might have strengthened Ford's case if she had not felt compelled to employ a multi-document hypothesis for the construction of Revelation.

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[30]In the following discussion of the sayings of John the Baptist and Jesus the final form of the Gospels is referred to. The concern here is not with the synoptic sources or even the actual words of Jesus or the Baptist but with the way they are portrayed by the gospel writers/redactors.

[31]P W Hollenbach, "The Conversion of Jesus: From Jesus the Baptizer to Jesus the Healer", Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt Part II, Vol. 25.1 (1980): 203-204. See also, E P Sanders, Jesus and Judaism (London: SCM Press, 1984), pp. 91-93.

[32]Possible evidence for this theory might be seen in such places as Acts 2:38, 3:19-20 and 26:20.

Other writers on Revelation have tended to consider Ford's 'Baptist' hypothesis to be far-fetched. In fact she no longer promotes the idea herself.[35] The possibility of direct literary descent, or any dependent relationship, of the Laodicean message from the Baptist has therefore remained unexplored.

It is possible, however, to see a number of significant points of contact between the call to repent made by John the Baptist, as recorded in the Gospels, and that made by John the Revelator in the Laodicean pericope (Rev 3:14-22). It would be interesting to speculate concerning the literary and theological influence of the Baptist on the Seer especially as the Baptist's school might have been influential in Western Asia Minor (see for instance Acts 18:24-26 and Acts 19:1-7).[36] However, dependency, either literary or thematic, is difficult to show with any certainty within early Christianity. Usually, the larger the time gap between the material in question the more chance there is of the latter being dependent on, or influenced by, the former. But composition dates for the Synoptics and Revelation are roughly contemporary.[37] Nevertheless virtually all scholars agree that in late first-century Asia Minor, there was a strong awareness of the Baptist's teaching, theology and methods.[38]

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[33]Ford, Revelation, pp. 3-4, and 28-30.

[34]Ibid., pp. 3-4 and 39-40. A date is not suggested.

[35]Aune, Revelation 1-5, p. cxi.

[36]See for instance the discussion in R E Brown, The Gospel According to John: I-XII, Anchor Bible (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1971), pp. *lxvii-lxx* and 46-48. Brown holds that there was an independent Baptist school that survived in some form into the second century CE. E Haenchen, The Acts of the Apostles (Oxford: Blackwells, 1965), claims that for Christians in Asia "the defensive battle against the Baptist sects was urgently required", p. 557. More recently both F S Spencer, Acts (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), p. 187 and G Lüdemann, Early Christianity According to the Traditions in Acts (London: SCM Press, 1989), pp. 210-212, refer to "disciples of the Baptist" at Ephesus but perceive them to be Jewish Christians rather than primarily followers of John.

[37]This thesis accepts the majority view on dating, e.g. a Domitianic date for Revelation and a post 70 CE date for Matthew and Luke.

[38]See for instance W Wink, John the Baptist in the Gospel Tradition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), pp. 184-6, 107-108; E Käsemann, "The Disciples of John the Baptist in

It is therefore legitimate to conjecture that John of Patmos was influenced by the Baptist within the broader context of early Christian *Bußpredigt* but in additional ways to the normal "synoptic" legacy of John the Baptist within early Christianity. A strong awareness of the Baptist could still have existed in the Christian communities of Asia Minor during the time that the author of the Apocalypse was active there. This may have been through those converted from the Baptist groups by the efforts of Paul and Luke, or his continued veneration among Jews and Jewish Christians generally.

Ford's thesis was that Revelation 1-3 was written by a late follower of the Baptist school who had become a Christian, most probably in Ephesus.[39] However, no attempt is made to justify this claim, or more importantly to this study, to demonstrate any literary or thematic links between Revelation 1-3 and the preaching of the Baptist. Nevertheless relationships of this nature can be found and will be explored below, but from a very different perspective to that of Ford.

There are no unique linguistic parallels to be found between the repentance preaching of the Baptist and the letter to the Laodiceans. One possible linguistic influence is the imperative, 'Repent!' But even with this Matthew's Baptist uses the present imperative, *μετανοεῖτε* (Matt 3:2), while John uses the aorist imperative, *μετανόησον* (Rev 3:19). The present imperative is also used by the Matthean Jesus (Matt 4:17), and the aorist imperative by Peter (Acts 8:22). Such distinctions are not very revealing. However, there are at least four distinctive themes and concerns that both the Baptist and the Seer share. These are more likely to be of significance to the approach that we are taking in this thesis and they will now be examined in turn.

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Ephesus" in Essays on New Testament Themes (London: SCM Press, 1964), p. 142; Spencer, p. 185; I H Marshall, Acts, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Leicester: IVP, 1980), pp. 305f.

## 2. Themes and Concerns

### a. Urgency

Firstly, there is the uncompromising urgency in the call to repent made by the Baptist and the Seer, (Matt 3:2 and Rev 3:19). In both cases the primary reason for this urgency is the expectation and proximity of Christ.[40] In Matt 3:11 Jesus is "he who is coming" and then suddenly in verse 13 *τότε παραγίνεται ὁ Ἰησοῦς*. The Baptist makes his call to repent in the context of the eschatological event of imminent Messianic judgement and restoration.

> The use of the present tense of the verb *ἔρχομαι* to describe the coming of the expected figure, rather than the future tense, suggests that the figure may already be 'travelling' and that his arrival is imminent.[41]

The Baptist's descriptions of the eschatological reaping and threshing activities of the coming one, (Matt 3:11-12, Luke 3:16-17), are rhetorically utilised in order to motivate his audience to repent.[42] Without the preparation of personal repentance, symbolised by water baptism, the individual will be ill prepared to greet, or be accepted by, the Messiah on his arrival. Indeed the recognition of Jesus as the Messiah at his baptism is an esoteric, rather than a universal, experience, (John 5:37).

These elements are also preserved in the summary that Paul gives of John the Baptist's message when he preached in the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:24-25). Here Paul refers to repentance as the Baptist's theme and uses the phrase *ἰδοὺ*

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[39]Ford, Revelation, p. 40.

[40]See Webb's chapter "John's Proclamation of an Expected Figure" in R L Webb, (ed.) John the Baptizer and Prophet, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series, 62 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), pp. 261-306.

[41]Webb, p. 301.

[42]C H H Scobie, John the Baptist (Philadelphia: SCM Press, 1964), pp. 66-67.

ἔρχεται. This helps build a picture of the Baptist calling for repentance right up to the moment that the Messiah heaves into view as it were. By using the Baptist in the list of witnesses to Jesus' messiahship whilst speaking to a synagogue audience, Paul shows that the Baptist was still an important figure in Diaspora Judaism. It is interesting to note that this passage is part of a sermon delivered to Jews in Pisidia, an area close to the circuit of churches to which the Seer sent Revelation.

This sense of imminence and urgency, found in the Baptist's *Bußpredigt*, is equally to be found in the repentance preaching of the Seer. The command to repent is followed by announcements of the imminent *parousia* in the letters to Ephesus (Rev 2:5); Pergamum (Rev 2:16); and Sardis (Rev 3:3).[43] In the Laodicean letter Christ is also depicted at the very eschatological threshold: "Look! (or 'Here I am!') I stand at the door and knock" (Rev 3:20). In Rev 3:18 the Laodiceans are commanded to buy clothes, gold and eyesalve. These actions, which symbolise repentance, are to be done in order "that you may see" (Rev 3:18). This 'seeing' must be at least partially eschatol-ogical and may even be a link with the seeing of God's face by the redeemed in the New Jerusalem referred to in Rev 22:4.[44] (For more on the urgency of the repentance calls of the letters see above p. 99.)

b. The Hypocrisy and Chastening of the Hearers

The second feature common to the repentance preaching of both the Baptist and the Seer is that both of them set out to expose the pride, hypocrisy and self-delusion of their target audiences. Hence in Matt 3:7-9 the Baptist calls the Pharisees and Sadducees γεννήματα ἐχιδνῶν and then informs them that their greatest source of pride, genetic

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[43]On the *parousia* in the letters and the rest of Revelation see Bauckham, The Climax of Prophecy, pp. 92-117.

descent from Abraham, is of no value at all in the shadow of the coming Messiah. Importantly John makes no attempt to humour or charm his audience. Even though they are making the effort to come out to him to be baptised he attacks them where it will hurt the most. Despite exposing their self-delusion in a very harsh manner, he evidently feels his position is strong enough that his call for them to repent will still be effective.

In the Laodicean letter the Seer also takes the uncompromising approach of directly exposing the pride and hypocrisy of his audience. The members of the Laodicean church are denounced as wretched, poor, blind and naked, in direct contrast to their own apparent self-image. John makes reference to the fact that they have made great claims of wealth, economic prowess, self-sufficiency and sanctimony (Rev 3:17). (On the debunking of audience claims as a rhetorical device see the sections below on "Disputation Speech", pp. 194-211.)

The only hope that either audience has of being saved from their hypocrisy is if they are to heed the repentance call extended to them in their state of self-delusion. It is also worth noting that both audiences are relying on human achievement, money and heritage, as opposed to spiritual values. (More parallel aspects of the Baptist's and the Seer's audiences will be explored below, p. 178.)

c. Repentance with Fruits

Thirdly the Baptist and the Seer both call for repentance to be accompanied with suitable purification, good deeds and spiritual accomplishments. Webb says of the Baptist's message:

> The repentance must not be superficial or temporary, but instead it must 'bear fruit' . . . . The call to repent is in the light of imminent judgement .

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[44]Beasley-Murray, p. 106; Krodel, p. 144.

> . . . No one is exempt; even the pious who might claim Abrahamic descent are called to repent.[45]

For the Baptist's audience these 'fruits' should include wealth sharing, honesty in financial matters and truthfulness (Luke 3:10-14). Josephus also records that the Baptist taught that good works were an essential part of true repentance (Antiquities 18.5.2).[46]

This is paralleled in the Seer's call for the Laodiceans to put their affairs in order, to be zealous and overcome. They are also instructed to buy purified gold, white clothes and eye-salve in order to become rich, clothed and sighted (Rev 3:18). This assistance has to come from an external divine source. Although the repentance call is couched in metaphorical language there is little doubt that the Laodiceans (and other readers of the Apocalypse) would have understood that practical changes in lifestyle, attitude and spirituality were being called for by the Seer. "The demand to act in a way appropriate for those who are children of light is therefore imperative . . ."[47]

Hollenbach summarises the Baptist's message thus:

> The wrath of God was coming on them as faithless Israelites (Matt 3:7). Only if they repented of their apostasy, gave up their presumption (Matt 3:9) and instead did works fit for repentance (Matt 3:8) both works of ritual purification (John 3:25) as well as works of social justice (Luke 3:10-14) would they escape God's wrath. Apocalyptic emphasis on God's imminent intervention against them must also have been strong (Matt 3:10).[48]

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[45]Webb, p. 185.
[46]As Webb points out, Ibid. See also Wink, p. 116.
[47]Rowland, Revelation, p. 65.
[48]P W Hollenbach, "Social Aspects of John the Baptizer's Preaching Mission in the Context of Palestinian Judaism", Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt, II 19.1 (1979), p. 857.

These factors apply equally to the repentance call elements of the letter to the Laodiceans. Both Johns are attempting to persuade their audiences to adopt behavioural changes, by the power of their rhetoric.

d. Fire of Purification

The concept of purification that Hollenbach picks up on above is also germane to this thesis. Most Christian repentance preaching is likely to include some of the same elements, techniques and the general themes dealt with thus far. Significantly, however, one motif that is unique to the Baptist and the Seer, at least within the New Testament. This is the visualisation of the repentance process being facilitated by purifying fire. The baptismal fire of Matt 3:11 is clearly a fire of purification. The first part of the repentance process is achieved by John through water, the process is not complete without the fire brought by Jesus. The fire has the dual function of both rewarding and providing spiritual progress for the repentant ones.[49]

In Rev 3:18 the buying of fire-refined gold is one of the acts that will demonstrate true repentance amongst the Laodiceans and facilitate a higher level of sanctity and spiritual awareness. Although it is not as evident that it is the second of a two phase process, as in Matt 3:11, the fact that the fire enhances the gold implies that it does have an improving function. (The two-phase aspects of the repentance preaching of both the Johns will be explored below, p. 182.)

Nowhere else in the New Testament are the ideas of purifying fire and repentance connected in this way. In other places where *πῦρ* and *μετανοεῖν* (or *μετάνοια*) occur in relation to one another such as 2 Peter 3:7-9 and Rev 9:18-20, the

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[49]Ibid., pp. 865-869. Also in support is J Dunn, "Spirit and Fire Baptism", Novum Testamentum 14 (1972): 81-92, but Webb, p. 294 is *contra*.

fire is always punitive and is intended to act upon the hearer as a 'fear' incentive to repent. In Matthew 3 and Revelation 3 however, the fire is a positive factor in the processes of repenting. In both of these occurrences of repentance preaching a reward for repentance is gained with the assistance of fire.

It is possible that the Seer and the Baptist both relied on Daniel 11-12 for this imagery. In Dan 11:35 and 12:10[50] the ideas of refining and redemption are connected. Commentators on Revelation do not explore the "gold - refined by fire" motif of Rev 3:18 in any depth, usually focusing only on the value of gold, or the paradox of the poor being asked to purchase something beyond their means.[51] Nevertheless, the use of the fire motif does provide a significant link between the Baptist's preaching and the letter to the Laodiceans that strongly suggests at least a thematic dependence. The theological emphasis that the Seer places on purification from pagan practices would account for why he saw fire-refined gold as a suitable metaphor for righteous deeds. It also builds on the spiritual temperature motif begun in Rev 3:15, "I wish that you were either hot or cold", and gives the reader a hint as to which extreme is really preferred by John.

## 3. Aspects of Audience

Aspects of audience that are common to John the Baptist and the author of Revelation will now be explored in more detail.

### a. Class and Finance

The Baptist's prime target audience was the establishment and even the elite, those in society who would have been considered comfortable and secure. These include the tax collectors, who were financially secure (Luke 3:12); the descendants of

Abraham, who felt racially secure (Luke 3:8); soldiers, who were physically secure (Luke 3:14); Pharisees and Sadducees who were politically and legally secure (Matt 3:7); priests and Levites, who were religiously secure (John 1:19); and even Herod and his family who were secure on many levels and very comfortable financially (Luke 3:19).

Hence John the Baptist's call to repent is addressed primarily to those who traditionally have confidence in their own power and ability. Hollenbach concludes that the Baptist's target audience is the relatively wealthy.[52] He is not especially interested in addressing the poor or disenfranchised. No outcasts, half-castes, poor or sick are specifically recorded as being present in John's audience. They are in Jesus' audience, however. In fact Jesus is presented as having a special interest in such underprivileged groups as shown by statement and action in Matt 4:23-24, 11:5, Luke 6:20, 7:22 and 4:18, "he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor".[53]

The Seer's audience, at least the implied audience of his seventh oracle, is similarly financially and religiously comfortable. Karrer believes that the text indicates that they were not just financially conceited but spiritually arrogant as well.[54] The Laodicean church felt secure in their own achievements and status and by all accounts the city was also renowned for its wealth and self-sufficiency. Many other commentators point out how Laodicea was a banking centre, had thriving industries and had refused

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[50]For the dependence of the language of Rev 3:18 on Daniel 11 and 12 see Bauckham, The Climax of Prophecy, p. 227, fn 49.

[51]Aune, Revelation 1-5, p. 259, Roloff, p. 65, Beasley-Murray, p. 106.

[52]Hollenbach, "Social Aspects of John the Baptizer's Preaching Mission", pp. 869-871.

[53]W D Davies and D C Allison, The Gospel According to Saint Matthew, Vol. I, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), pp. 442-447; and M Goulder, Luke, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series, 20 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), pp. 145-153.

[54]"*In Laodizea wird also behauptet, reich zu sein nicht nur an irdischen Gütern, sondern vor allem am Gut des Heils in all seiner Fülle, und wird mit dieser Behauptung das Ungenügen des christlichen Lebensvollzugs überspielt, ja überhaupt nicht empfunden.*" Karrer, p. 208.

help from Rome after an earthquake in the reign of Nero.[55] Unlike some of the other churches they do not face persecution, schism or heresy. Rev 3:17 depicts the Laodicean church as corporately boasting "I am rich and I have acquired wealth and I have no need of anything." It is possible that the Laodiceans reminded John of the Baptist's audience. None of the other six churches resemble it so closely. Disabusing the Laodiceans of their smugness is one of the Seer's main objectives. So using similar rhetoric and *Bußpredigt* methods to the Baptist is appropriate for the Laodicean situation as well.

Both the Seer and the Baptist have 'financial' advice to give to their worldly wise audiences. The Baptist advises actual wealth distribution and fair taxation (Luke 3:11-14). The Seer, on the other hand, hinges his advice around an investment metaphor, the deed of 'buying' that which is spiritually valuable and refined (Rev 3:18). Using a fiscal concept like this with a community of bankers is none too subtle, but nevertheless it is rhetorically effective for here:

> . . . buying is figurative for obtaining. Christ admonishes the church to realize that it is actually poor in spirituality and that it needs to obtain from him the gifts that cannot be purchased with money.[56]

Evidently both Johns believed that their audiences were corrupted by their material wealth and hence they call for a reapplication of resources, both spiritual and material.

b. Complacency of Audience

Following on from the above it is evident from the text of the Laodicean letter and the Baptist material in the gospels that both Johns considered that their audiences had allowed their material/social security to result in spiritual complacency. For the Seer

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[55]Hemer, pp. 191-196, Aune, Revelation 1-5, p. 249.
[56]Metzger, p. 45. See also Morris, Revelation, pp. 82-83.

this is demonstrated by the notorious label "lukewarm". Indeed as Metzger points out[57] the Laodicean community is the only one of the seven to supply the English language with a word - Laodicean - which means complacent or indifferent.

From the Baptist's perspective his audience is complacent about their religious standing with God (Matt 3:7-9). These Pharisees and Sadducees are threatened with being "cut down and thrown into the fire" (Matt 3:10) with a violence, suddenness and the same direct involvement of God as the Laodiceans are about to be vomited out of his mouth (Rev 3:16). Hence in both cases the punishment for continuing in complacency is violent divine rejection characterised by physical expulsion. Others among those coming out to the Jordan to hear John are so complacent about the needs of the poor that he has to spell out specific examples of resource sharing to them (Luke 3:11-14).

c. The Quoting of the Audience

Probably the most significant parallel audience feature is that both John the Baptist and John of Patmos quote the words of their audience back to them. This is done in order to condemn, contradict, shame and correct them. Both audience groups boast of that which is of no value in God's eyes although it is valued by their society. In Matt 3:9 the Baptist declares "do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham." And in Rev 3:17 the Seer says "you declare, 'I am rich and I have acquired wealth and I have no need of anything.' But you do not realise that you are the wretchedest; pitiful, poor, blind and naked." The quoted words reveal the folly of the audience group and helps to place the prophet on high moral ground from where he can call for a change of heart and deliver corrective instructions.

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[57]Metzger, p. 44, fn 1.

This technique of quoting in order to condemn, comes, as will be demonstrated below, from the Old Testament prophetic device known in rhetorical analysis as Disputation Speech. It is highly significant to the study of the rhetoric of repentance calls. The profound influence of this prophetic form on the Laodicean letter will be discussed in detail in the second part of this chapter (below pp. 194f).

**4. <u>Theology - Two Phase Redemption</u>**

The New Testament portrays the Baptist as a precursor to Jesus, an important yet subordinate way-maker. His water baptism is therefore inferior to Jesus' subsequent spirit and fire baptism. "I baptise you with/in water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with/in the Holy Spirit and fire" (Matt 3:11). John's baptism represents the first stage in the processes of redemption and enlightenment that culminates in the experiential baptism that the believer receives from Christ.[58] Demonstrating repentance of the kind that John advocates involves straight-forward physical and financial penance. His baptism is akin to a rite of ritual purification. The second, Messianic phase, that John foresees for those who have responded to him, is spiritual and of an altogether more esoteric, relational and eschatological nature.[59] In the Synoptic Gospels the relational aspects are in the possessive term "his wheat", and the pivotal spirit/fire baptism (Matt 3:11-12). In John 1:39-42 the relational bonding and parity with Christ is emphasised by the story of the calling of the disciples which follows immediately after the Baptist hails Jesus as the Lamb of God.

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[58]Wink. pp. 36-37.
[59]Hollenbach. "Social Aspects of John the Baptizer's Preaching Mission". p. 866.

A two phase redemptive process is also evident in the Laodicean letter.[60] The Seer first calls for spiritual actions, rather than material good works, but these actions are couched in material terms. These include buying eye ointment and covering one's nakedness (Rev 3:18). The things the reader is called to do are righteous 'deeds' to be done by those who wish to show they are zealous in their desire to escape lukewarmness. These actions are as dramatic and obvious as those called for by the Baptist. However, in the second part of the letter a second phase of the redemption process is introduced. Worthy deeds and zeal give way to the establishment of an eschatological relationship, symbolised by a shared meal. "If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to be with them and eat with them, and they will eat with me" (Rev 3:20). The shared meal was a strong symbol of a covenant, often with salvific and liturgical overtones in the ancient world both within a biblical context, (the Passover - Num 9:9-13), (the wolf and lamb feeding together in New Jerusalem - Isa 65:25), (the Eucharist - 1 Cor 11:33), as well as Graeco-Roman religious practice.[61] Sweet sees the implied feast of Rev 3:20 as referring both back, to the Last Supper and forward, to the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev 19:9).[62] Most commentators recognise Christ's promise in Rev 3:20 as an allusion to the future messianic banquet.[63]

The final reward for the repentant is other-worldly and eschatological, involving a relational parity with Christ. "To the conqueror I will give a place on my throne with me, just as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne" (Rev 3:21).

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[60]On the overall place of redemptive themes in Revelation's structure see Surridge, pp. 233-235.

[61]Aune, Revelation 1-5, p. 251-2.

[62]Sweet, p. 109; see also Ford, Revelation, p. 422.

[63]E.g. Bauckham, The Climax of Prophecy, pp. 106-107; Lohmeyer, p. 39; Metzger, p. 46; Schüssler Fiorenza, Revelation; Vision of a Just World, p. 49. But not Aune, Revelation 1-5, p. 261, for who Christ is the guest rather than the host.

The repentant conquerors, or overcomers,[64] are promised a share in the very experience of Christ himself. What is more it is an experience of transcendental magnitude because the Father's throne is a focal point of power and righteousness in Revelation, possibly even "the central symbol of the whole book".[65]

On a lesser scale, but arguably in a similar relational manner, the disciples share Jesus' resting place in John 1:39b. In the Fourth Gospel this takes place immediately after they have witnessed Jesus proclaimed as the son of God by the Baptist and then been called by him, (John 1:35-39a). This parallels how those who partake in the humble, preparatory water baptism of the Baptist will move on to the other-worldly, spirit and fire baptism which will bond them to Jesus. It is partially because they have heard what the witness (i.e. the Baptist) has said of Jesus that they are able to acknowledge him as Messiah and initiate others into the circle of followers (John 1:40-41). This hearing aspect of the process might be paralleled by the Seer's admonition, "those having the ability to hear - let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Rev 3:22).

In Matt 3:11-12 the message about the coming one is only for those who are repentant. John is speaking only to those whom he is baptising or who are seeking baptism in good faith.[66] In Revelation it is implicit that only those who have first followed John's advice about buying, overcoming and repenting will be able to partake in the shared covenantal 'meal and throne' experience with Christ.

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[64]On the relationship between the repentant and the conquerors in Revelation 2-3 see above p. 101.

[65]R Bauckham, The Theology of the Book of Revelation, pp. 141-142. Also Aune, Revelation 1-5, pp. 276-278 and Sweet, p. 117. For a discussion of the recurrent use of throne as a repentance generating motif in Revelation see above, p. 119.

[66]Hollenbach, "Social Aspects of John the Baptizer's Preaching Mission", p. 858.

## 5. Conclusions on Parallels with the Baptist

Both the Seer and the Baptist would naturally have looked to the Old Testament prophets for repentance call paradigms. They would also have been attracted by the same Old Testament passages because they had similar messages to deliver and their audiences also had parallels. The Baptist was a successor to the Hebrew prophets in both his message and function.[67] But so was John of Patmos as was argued at the outset of this chapter. The Seer, like the Baptist before him, shaped his *Bußpredigt* material for a specific dynamic purpose. The content, thematic concerns, rhetoric and structure of his call to repent were designed to drive the Laodicean community through repentance and on to covenantal fulfilment.

Many parallels in themes, concerns, audience and even theology between the Baptist's message and the Laodicean letter have been demonstrated above. Differences also exist between them. The Baptist is depicted as having an audience who are divided in their response to his repentance calls. Some reject him and are condemned while others do repent and move into a relationship with Jesus.[68] The text of Rev 3:14-22 shows that, with the Laodiceans, rejection has not yet occurred but that if it does the entire group will be rejected and damned together.

However, enough parallels and similarities exist between the repentance preaching of the Baptist and the Seer in the Laodicean letter, to reflect the existence of a 'school' of apocalyptic Christian *Bußpredigt*. It seems quite evident that the Baptist (and his school) had a sociological and thematic influence on the Apocalypse. Further exploration of this phenomenon might reveal a dependent literary relationship. However,

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[67]As Hill puts it. "the Synoptic gospels describe the call . . . appearance . . . and the preaching of John wholly after the manner of Old Testament prophets." D Hill, p. 45; see also pp. 43-47.

the closeness in date and lack of much external evidence would make it difficult to prove this beyond reasonable doubt.

## C. Jeremiah

Jeremiah is one of the Hebrew prophets whose repentance calls are worth investigating as potential sources for repentance preaching models used by the Seer. Both Hill and Müller[69] have suggested Jer 7:3-15 as a call which may have been a partial model for John's call to the Laodiceans.

The essential call here is for reform, יטב [*yätab*] (translated *διόρθωσις* in the Septuagint), which is a slightly different concept from repent, usually שוב [*shub*] (translated *ἐπιστρέφειν* in the LXX). In the Septuagint *μετανοεῖν* usually means consider or regret and rarely means repent or convert, a meaning which it only gradually acquired in the Hellenistic world. [70] (A discussion of the New Testament development of the concept of repentance appears above, pp. 163-168.)

Despite this slight difference a number of thematic and rhetorical similarities are to be found between the Jeremiah passage and the repentance calls in Revelation 2-3, and even the Baptist material of Matthew 3. Jeremiah quotes the words of the people, or at least their potential words, in order to contradict them (Jer 7:4). "Do not trust in deceptive words and say, "This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD!" (NIV) Those addressed are complacent and self-satisfied because of their possession of "the temple of the Lord." They are also pictured by Jeremiah as standing before the temple and boasting "we are safe" (Jer 7:10). Like the Laodiceans

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[68]Hollenbach, "Social Aspects of John the Baptizer's Preaching Mission", p. 875.
[69]D Hill, pp. 83-86, Müller, pp. 60-80.

they are given detailed instructions on how to demonstrate their repentance and conversion in practical terms:

> For if you truly amend your ways and your doings, if you truly act justly one with another, if you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own hurt . . . (Jer 7:5-6)

These instructions are followed by a conditional promise focusing on possession of the land and fellowshipping with God, ". . . then I will dwell with you in this place" (Jer 7:7). The call concludes with a conditional threat which warns of divine rejection:

> . . . therefore I will do to the house that is called by my name, in which you trust, and to the place that I gave to you and to your ancestors, what I did to Shiloh. And I will cast you out of my sight . . . (Jer 7:14-15)

Of the five letters that call for repentance in Revelation 2-3, four have similar threats and promises to Jeremiah 7, although the threats always precede the promises in Revelation. The threats in the letters to the churches and those in Jeremiah 7 both revolve around the idea of God intervening in a deliberate way to strike those who refuse to repent/reform, e.g. Rev 2:5, 2:16, 2:22; 3:3, 3:16 and Jer 7:14-15. Of further significance, both John and Jeremiah deliver their repentance messages as though they were spoken by God in the first person. Thus the prophet adopts a position in the hierarchy of the narrative (see below, p. 191) that enables him to assert maximum rhetorical leverage over his audience.

Also of significance, especially as far as the Laodicean pericope is concerned, are the motifs of proximity to the divine presence. In both prophetic utterances there is a

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[70]Theological Dictionary of the New Testament. "μετανοέω."

promise to be with the repentant in some intimate physical closeness and a threat that lack of repentance will result in a form of banishment.

Mazzaferri has attempted at some length to demonstrate (successfully in my view) that the conditionalism of John's prophecies is a deliberate generic choice[71]. This therefore separates him theologically, and to some extent generically, from the visionaries of classical apocalyptic whose messages are very often deterministic.[72] Like the ancient Old Testament prophets Revelation conveys God's urgent, conditional message to his people and the nations.[73]

Thus in certain aspects of style and function, and in the broad terms suggested by Müller, both a structural and theological similarity between Jeremiah's repentance preaching, the Baptist's call to repentance and the call to repent in Rev 3:14-21, can be clearly observed. That both of these New Testament prophets were drawing from the same source in the Old Testament seems highly probable. (See also the diagram below, p. 215.)

Müller's suggested pattern and parallels for *Bußpredigt* can be seen therefore to have validity and worth in the attempt to unearth possible models and paradigms for the call to repentance in the letters as a whole. Indeed the letters share so many elements that they must at one level be considered together. But the letter to Laodicea is distinctive in a number of ways. Indeed, Hemer concludes that the literary relationships of the Laodicean letter both within Revelation and outside it are "peculiar in several

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[71]See in particular Mazzaferri, pp. 327, and 374-378.

[72]Mazzaferri points out that "In stark contrast to the conditionality of prophecy, determinism dominates apocalyptic." p. 239. See also Rowland, The Open Heaven, pp. 90 and 144. Examples from apocalyptic literature include 1 Enoch 89:58, Jubilees 2:20 and 15:26-32. Caird, p. 177 is *contra*.

[73]Mazzaferri, p. 376-378, see also L Morris, Apocalyptic (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973), p. 92f.

respects."[74] The interest of this thesis lies particularly in the repentance elements of the letter, and one such distinction is the way the Laodicean repentance call shows the influence of the Baptist's *Bußpredigt*, as investigated above. The other distinction, which is linked directly to the rhetoric of the repentance call is one that has not been examined by previous commentators or scholars and it will now be investigated in detail.

## D. The Quotation of the Laodiceans by John

In the Laodicean message those who are addressed have their <u>own</u> words quoted back to them with rhetorical intent. This unusual feature of the pericope will now be extensively examined as I consider it to be the most significant literary Old Testament model for the Laodicean call to repentance. This model, or rhetorical device, is known to literary critics of the Hebrew Bible as 'Disputation Speech.'

In Rev 3:17 John quotes the words of the Laodiceans themselves; ". . . you declare 'I am rich and I have acquired wealth and I have no need of anything.'" It is significant that John chooses to portray their sins in this form, putting words of self-delusion directly into their mouths. He does not use this device anywhere else in the messages to the seven churches, though it might be partially in use in Rev 18:4-8 where the words of Babylon the 'whore' are quoted.[75] In the literary composition and rhetorical strategy of the Laodicean letter it stands out from the rest of the text, demonstrating John's ability to structure his work on yet another level.

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[74]Hemer, pp. 184-185.

[75]An analysis of the structural and literary antecedents of Revelation 18 is well outside the boundaries of this thesis, however, see footnote 116 below.

## 1. Rhetorical Structure

The rhetorical situation of the seven letters of Revelation 2-3 as a whole is quite complex.[76] It begins to be signalled in chapter one of the Apocalypse. John is informing the churches (Rev 1:9) about the vision he has received in which the divine Christ (Rev 1:18) is addressing, through the medium of John's vision and written word (Rev 1:19), the angel of the church in Laodicea (3:14). It is also possible to identify three narrative strata which under-pin the whole of Revelation 1-3, namely, Christ to John, Christ to churches and John to readers of the whole work.[77] The reality of the ecclesiastical hierarchy and the question of who is actually being addressed is therefore not immediately clear. This is in part due to the ambiguous role played by the angels of the churches (Rev 2:1, 2:8, 2:12, 2:18, 3:1, 3:7, 3:14).

Using a Jewish tradition that connects angels and priests Manns argues that the 'angels' were the bishops or congregational leaders of the local churches[78]. Fiorenza also explores this matter and takes the very different view that the angels represent the process of prophetic communication.[79] More usually they are understood to "represent the churches seen as spiritual entities."[80] A recent major work on angels in Judaism and early Christianity examines the complex theology of angels in Revelation, including the angels of the churches.[81] Stuckenbruck demonstrates that these angels differ from others

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[76]On the rhetorical criticism of Revelation in general see above, pp. 74-78.

[77]These levels are identified by Kirby in his study of the rhetorical situation of Revelation 1-3, pp. 197-207.

[78]F Manns, "L'évêque, ange de l'Église," Ephemerides Liturgicae 104 (1990): 176-181.

[79]Schüssler Fiorenza, Revelation: Vision of a Just World, pp. 52-53.

[80]Sweet, p. 73.

[81]L T Stuckenbruck, Angel Veneration and Christology, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe. 70 (Tübingen: J C B Mohr, 1995). Others have given briefer surveys of the interpretation of these angels, for instance Hemer, pp. 32-34, and Karrer, pp. 169-186.

in the Apocalypse, especially because of the link with Rev 1:20.[82] Partially, at least, they have a rôle in establishing Revelation's Christology, as "the author's representation of angels in the seven letters involves a demotion from views of angelic function held by the intended readers."[83] Thus the letters help in establishing Christ's unambiguous superiority to the many and varied angelic beings that occur in the Apocalpyse. This also means that hierarchies indicated by the narrative are germane to understanding the theology of Revelation.

Perhaps it would be beneficial therefore, at this point to apply some of the strategies and terms of Narrative Criticism to the Laodicean letter.

## 2. Terminology of Narrative Criticism

Narrative Criticism gives us the following categories in the writer/reader dialogue. The 'Real Author' and 'Real Reader' are the historical people who actually produce the text and are the first to read or hear it. With much ancient literature little can be known about these people historically, but narrative criticism really needs them only on a theoretical level. The important categories, at least for our study, are the 'Implied Reader' and the 'Implied Author'[84]. The 'Implied Reader' of a text is the reader in the form in which he is implied in the text, that is, the reader the text invites one to be. The 'Implied Author' is the persona which the author adopts for the purpose of relating the narrative. It is important, particularly when a final form of a text, which may have gone though various recensions, is being read away from its cultural origins, that an 'implied reader' mentality be adopted by those actually reading a text.

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[82]Stuckenbruck, pp. 232f.

[83]Ibid., p. 238.

[84]In some narrative critical schemes and analysis these are known as the 'Ideal Reader' and the 'Ideal Author'.

Beyond this, some texts employ a narrative device known as a 'Narrator' and a 'Narratee.' These personae are the *supposed* teller of the tale, and the *supposed* listener, reader or narrative audience.[85] For example, Scheherazade is the narrator and the Sultan is the narratee in the "Thousand and One Nights".

By looking for these categories, or levels, within the narrative structure of the seven letters it becomes evident that Christ is intended to be the 'Narrator' and the angel of the church is given the rôle of the 'Narratee'. However, the Implied Reader is the lukewarm member of the Laodicean community, or those who have lost their first love at Ephesus (or any one else in the other churches who fits those descriptions). The Implied Author is John, the prophet/pastor with a deep concern for the spiritual health of his distant "flock."

In the Laodicean letter, however, the complex use of a reported quotation adds another hierarchical level to the narrative: "Because you declare 'I am rich and I have acquired wealth and I have no need of anything.' But you do not realise that you are the wretchedest; pitiful, poor, blind and naked" (Rev 3:17). Thus a Narrative Critical analysis might need to develop an even deeper level of reader/writer interaction at this point. Although the text stays in the singular the Implied Readers (and perhaps even the real readers) do seem to break through to the surface as we hear their words quoted. Hence although it is the Narratee, the "angel of the church", who is accused of saying "I am rich . . ." narrative analysis verifies that it is actually the Implied Readers, the Laodiceans (and anyone else in the other churches who is similarly self-assured and arrogant), that are speaking these boastful words.

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[85]I am indebted to Robert Fowler's article "Who is 'the Reader' in Reader Response Criticism?", in Semeia 31 (1985): 10-12, for these definitions.

This complex rhetorical situation of the message to Laodicea can be expressed in chart form thus:

| **Narrative Level** | **Author** | **Hearer** |
|---|---|---|
| Real | 'John' | Members of Christian community in Laodicea |
| Implied | The Seer of Patmos | Lukewarm boasters |
| Narration | Christ | Angel of the church |
| Quotation/Quoter | Christ | Implied/Real readers |
| Those Quoted | Boasters | Laodicean Christians |

Of course it would seem unlikely that this quotation is an historical statement from within the Laodicean community. Ramsay believes it to be a close paraphrase of the city's response to Rome after the earthquake of 60-61CE.[86] Aune and Royalty have explored its literary parallels with a diatribe of Epictetus.[87] For the modern reader at least, it appears that the Seer is pointing out to the Laodiceans that, by their actions and attitudes, they are boasting about their self-sufficiency and wealth. However, the significant factor at this point is not whether these words were spoken in the city of Laodicea or its Christian church. What is of significance is that John makes a choice to portray their sins dramatically via this particular literary form, putting words of boastful self-delusion directly into their mouths, *λέγεις ὅτι Πλούσιός εἰμι . . .* This unique use of the device indicates a desire on the author's behalf to address a specific spiritual need in the readership.

The quoted statement, containing as it does a crude and hollow boast, boldly represents the Laodicean sins of self-delusion and conceit. As a rhetorical device it also enables the prophet to make an instant, scathing response. Due to the judicial overtones,

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[86]Ramsay, The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia, p. 428.

[87]Aune, Revelation 1-5, pp. 258-259. R M Royalty, "The Streets of Heaven: The Imagery and Ideology of Wealth in the Apocalypse of John," (PhD thesis, Yale, 1995), pp. 208-210.

and Old Testament usage of this literary form, the prophet places himself where he can condemn most scathingly. After the damning evidence of the Laodiceans' statement John immediately contradicts their claims. Having debunked their pomposity and unmasked their self-delusion, he counsels them and calls them to repent. Finally he encourages them to overcome and predicts the rewards. This literary pattern of quoting the target audience's vain words, prophetically refuting them, and then following this with councel and/or exhortation reveals this passage to be very similar in structure and function to the Disputation Speeches of the Old Testament classical prophets.

### 3. The Use of Disputation Speech in the Old Testament

Disputation Speech is a literary technique used by certain Old Testament prophets, particularly in times of moral crisis. It is "the prophetic device of quoting the people's words in order to refute them."[88] This form of prophetic speech is used quite sparingly in the Hebrew Bible by only a selection of the canonical prophets. But in his Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech Westermann acknowledges that it has a significant place within the array of literary devices and narrative tools that the Hebrew prophets used for transmitting their messages to the people.[89] It is one of a number of forms that comprise the larger category of 'Judgements Against Israel'. Westermann also uses the loose category "Disputation Oracle" to help define certain salvation utterance of the prophets, particularly Deutero-Isaiah, in his more recent study of Old Testament salvation oracles.[90]

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[88]A Graffy, A Prophet Confronts His People: The Disputation Speeches in the Prophets (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1984), p. 105.

[89]C Westermann, Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech (London: Lutterworth Press, 1967), pp. 199-201.

[90]C Westermann, Prophetic Oracles of Salvation in the Old Testament (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), especially pp. 47-50.

The seminal study on this literary form is A Prophet Confronts His People: The Disputation Speeches in the Prophets by Adrian Graffy. In this work Graffy applies a number of very tight restrictions to the literary form he is investigating. By doing so he is left with sixteen definite disputation passages in the prophets; one in Isaiah, two in Deutero-Isaiah, three in Jeremiah, one in Haggai and, significantly for a study of Revelation, nine in Ezekiel. Although Graffy is possibly over-restrictive in his definition of Disputation Speech, his criteria and limitations will, for the sake of controlling the parameters of this study, be generally followed. This will help to pull the form into a sharper focus and help to demonstrate more clearly how it functions on a rhetorical and narrative level. It will also assist in the investigation of the motives that the prophet has for using this form in particular.

According to Graffy the literary structure of a disputation speech follows a distinctive pattern which consists of the following elements:

i. A 'Coming of the Word' Introduction

ii. The Quotation of the people's opinion/words

iii. An optional Remark/explanation

iv. An optional Programmatic Refutation

v. The Primary Refutation which corrects the people's opinion

vi. An optional Double Refutation providing councel and/or explanation

Although there is some flexibility within this pattern the 'Quotation' and 'Refutation' always appear solidly at the core of the literary device. The pattern is shown below as it is applied by Graffy[91] to a disputation speech in Ezekiel, specifically Ezk 33:23-29.

| Section | Verse | Ezekiel 33:23-29 |
|---|---|---|
| Coming of the Word: Introduction | 23 | The word of the Lord came to me: |
| Remark | 24a | Mortal, the inhabitants of these waste places in the land of Israel keep saying, |
| Quotation of the People's Words | 24b | "Abraham was only one man, yet he got possessed of the land; but we are many; the land is surely given us to posses." |
| First Refutation | 25-26 | Therefore say to them, "Thus says Lord God: You eat flesh with the blood, and lift up your eyes to your idols, and shed blood; shall you then possess the land? You depend on your swords, you commit abominations, and each of you defiles his neighbour's wife. Shall you then possess the land? |
| Second Refutation | 27-29 | Say this to them, Thus says the Lord God: As I live, surely those who are in the waste places shall fall by the sword; and those who are in the open field I will give to the wild animals to be devoured; and those who are in strongholds and in caves shall die by pestilence. I will make the land a desolation and a waste, and its proud might shall come to an end; and the mountains of Israel shall be so desolate that no one will pass through. Then they shall know that I am the Lord, when I have made the land a desolation and a waste because of all their abominations that they have committed. |

This example reveals that the words of the people come by inspiration to the prophet rather than being reported in a normal manner. The refutation takes issue with at least some of the specifics of the idle boast of the people (who become the prophets audience). The refutation deals with issues of inheritance, self-delusion, threatened rejection and the recognition of God as rightful sovereign. These are features of this rhetorical device used by the prophets in the examples Graffy isolates. The motivation for its utilisation is to persuade the audience to alter their opinion and/or behaviour, usually back to a purer state when they were more in tune with the will of God.[92]

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[91]Graffy, pp. 78-82.
[92]Ibid., pp. 118-124.

## 4. New Testament Usage and Adaptation of the Disputation Speech Form

Graffy[93] also suggests that the antithetical speeches of Matthew's Jesus in Matt 5:21-48, which berate those who misapply the law, owe much to the Old Testament disputation speech form. Graffy points out that Matthew gives Jesus' speeches a two part structure which follows a formal introduction. They also utilise the rhetorical ploy of quoting the audience. There is much in this, and it certainly appears that Matthew is aware of this particular prophetic form. But there are also important differences. All but one of the quotations in Matthew 5 (i.e. Matt 5:21, 27, 31) are taken from the Torah rather than coming from the mouths of the people. Although the people may be quoting the Torah for cynical ends in Matthew it is usually the case in Old Testament disputation speech that secular boasting or snide mocking of the prophet constitutes the audience quotation. Jesus' answers are not exactly refutations in the prophetic tradition either. Rather they are calls for a transition from the letter to the spirit of the laws of the Torah referred to by the audience. However, the mode and rhetorical function of the Matthew quotation devices are both reminiscent of Old Testament disputation speeches.

I believe in fact that John the Baptist comes closer to the original Disputation Speech form than Jesus does in the passage that Graffy focuses on.[94] This is particularly evident where the Baptist quotes and refutes the words of the Pharisees and Sadducees, "do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham" (Matt 3:9). However, his refutation falls short of the classic Disputation Speech format because it has no specific divine authority, and the quotation is not delivered to him via divine oracle as it

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[93]Ibid., pp. 124-128.

usually is in the Old Testament prophets. But again the Baptist's rhetorical motives are the same as those usually evident in the prophets. John also exposes his enemies' spiritual complicity and hypocrisy by using their own claims to expose their spiritual poverty. This shows a functional parallel with the disputation speeches as used in the Hebrew Bible. Matt 3:9 is at least as close to the spirit of this classical prophetic speech form as the words of Jesus in Matthew 5, if not closer. This is significant, especially when viewed in the light of the links between the Baptist's repentance call and the Laodicean letter that have already been demonstrated above (pp. 169f.) This will be born in mind as the discussion proceeds.

Graffy summarises the function of Disputation Speeches in the Hebrew prophets thus:

> The disputation speech is a direct encounter of God's messenger, the prophet, with the people, an encounter in which the prophet meets the people where they stand. In the disputation speech God's word confronts the inadequacies of man's opinions. The prophet's word comes to transform the hearts of the people, to lead them to an awareness of their guilt and to a secure trust in God. When Jesus uses the disputation speech he too endeavours to change men's hearts, to lead them from where they stand to a deeper knowledge of his Father's will.[95]

It is the fact that the prophet uses this device to challenge the people where they stand, morally and religiously, in order to transform them that particularly makes Disputation Speech relevant to the study of the rhetoric of repentance calls. By employing it an

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[94]Other possible uses or variants of this form in the New Testament include 1 John 1:6-10, 1 Corinthians 5 and 10. Exploring these further is beyond the scope of this work.

author demonstrates that he is intent on utilising linguistic and rhetorical techniques to persuade his audience to repent.

## 5. Application of the Disputation Speech Paradigm to the Laodicean Letter

It is evident that the Laodicean letter contains a Disputation Speech, or at the very least uses a similar, derivative, literary technique. Graffy himself makes no reference to Revelation. As far as I am aware other scholars who have looked at Old Testament antecedents of the Laodicean pericope[96] have not seen this structural parallel. In fact Moyise thinks that "there has not been a major study on John's use of Scripture in the seven messages."[97] However, the influence of the Disputation Speech form on the Laodicean letter can be clearly demonstrated by using the structure suggested by Graffy and applying it to Rev 3:14b-19 in the following way:

| Section | Verse | Revelation 3:14b-19 |
|---|---|---|
| Coming of the Word: Introduction | 14b | The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the prime source of God's creation says this: |
| Remark | 15-16 | I know (from) your works, that you are neither hot nor cold. I wish that you were either hot or cold. So since you are lukewarm, neither hot or cold, I am about to vomit you out of my mouth. |
| Quotation | 17a | Because you declare, "I am rich and I have acquired wealth and I have no need of anything." |
| First Refutation | 17b | But you do not realise that you are the wretchedest; pitiful, poor, blind and naked. |
| Second Refutation | 18-19 | I advise you to buy from me gold - refined by fire - so that you may become rich; white clothes so that you can dress yourself and cover up the shame of you nakedness; and eye ointment, to anoint your eyes, so that you can see. I rebuke and I discipline all those whom I love. So be zealous and repent! |

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[95]Ibid., p. 129.

[96]E.g. S Thompson, The Apocalypse and Semitic Syntax, Aune, Revelation 1-5, and Moyise. Interestingly Aune, Revelation 1-5, pp. 258-259, does suggest some sources for the quoting of claims of being rich, e.g. Arrian, Epictetus Diss. 3.7.29, 1 Enoch 97:8-9 and Hosea 12:9, but these are thematic rather than structural parallels.

[97]Moyise, p. 21.

A structural analysis such as this demonstrates that this part of the Laodicean letter (the bulk of it in fact) fits the Disputation Speech form at least as well as Jesus' words in Matthew 5 or the Baptist's in Matthew 3. In addition to this basic literary structure other characteristics of this prophetic form are also evident in the Laodicean letter. Each of these will now be explored in turn.

a. Divine Speech Element

The introductory element of the Disputation Speech frequently contains a formal divine speech element. This serves to explain and authorise the 'coming of the word' to the prophet. As Graffy puts it "the formula of the coming of the word makes quite clear that it is Yahweh who informs the prophet of the people's words."[98] Hence, Hag 1:2 "Thus says Yahweh the all powerful" and Rev 3:14b "These are the words of the Amen." On occasion the following 'remark' element then serves to identify, caricature and vilify the recipients of the word in a way that connects to the Divine Speech element. Hence, Isa 28:14-15a "hear the word of the Lord you scoffers who rule the people of Jerusalem. Because you have said . . ." This aspect is also present in the Laodicean letter. In Rev 3:15-16 the church is caricatured as lukewarm and vilified as detestable, something to be ejected from the Divine presence. Just as in many of the Old Testament Disputation Speeches it is the target audience's unsavoury nature that brings them to God's attention and elicits the prophetic warning and exhortation.

It is well known that the introductions to the letters of Revelation 2-3 have a common pattern and christological function which draws on Revelation 1.

The seven letters are written according to a common fourfold plan. First comes a recitation of the qualities of Christ, drawn for the most part from

> the description in the first chapter; and we can see that in many cases these qualities are chosen because of their peculiar relevance to the local situation.[99]

Despite the need to accommodate this pattern that John has set for the letters' introductions, the introduction to the Laodicean message, Rev 3:14, also reflects the most common type of introduction and remark in the Disputation Speech genre; that is, a Divine speech element. Bearing in mind the complexity of the rhetorical situation (as was shown above, p. 191), the chosen pattern of the letters and the need to maintain the textual relationship with chapter one, it is a demonstration of John's skill and his rhetorical intent that he keeps to this formal introduction in his 'disputation speech.' His structuring of the text and choice of allusions and models is designed to have maximum persuasive effect on his readers.

b. Cynicism and Arrogance of Hearers

The prophets that use Disputation Speeches do so at times when cynicism, arrogance and spiritual decline are manifest among their audience.[100] Disrespect for the prophet (as both an individual and an office) has often reached a peak in society. He is thought to be unnecessary, ineffective or merely an entertaining spectacle by his audience. A good example of this attitude is found in the Disputation Speech found in Ezekiel 12, "Son of man, what is this proverb that you have in the land of Israel, saying, 'The days grow long, and every vision comes to naught'?" (Ezk 12:22).

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[98]Graffy, p. 108.
[99]Caird, p. 27.
[100]Graffy, pp. 119-122.

Confidence in one's own abilities is another major factor in many of the situations that give rise to disputation speech usage. A quotation of the people used by Isaiah serves as an example:

> Because you have said, "We have made a covenant with death, and with Sheol we have an agreement; when the overwhelming scourge passes through, it will not come to us, for we have made lies our refuge and in falsehood we have taken shelter." (Isa 28:15)

Dissuading them from "their confidence in their own ability to survive destruction due to their forging of political arrangements and their dishonesty"[101] is the prophet's mission and motive for rhetorically utilising the Disputation Speech pattern. The people need to be warned that their self confidence is endangering the status of their salvation. Likewise, as is well known, the Laodiceans boasted of their own ability to survive and rebuild their city without a grant from Rome after a massive earthquake during the reign of Nero, around 60CE.[102] John thinks that the attitude of the city of Laodicea is reflected in its Christian community.

> . . . there is good reason for seeing Rev 3:17 against the background of the boasted affluence of Laodicea, notoriously exemplified in her refusal of Roman aid and her carrying through a great programme of reconstruction in a spirit of proud independence . . . The flourishing church was exposed as partaking of the standards of the society . . . It was spiritually self-sufficient and saw no need of Christ's aid.[103]

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[101]Ibid., p. 120.

[102]Tacitus, Annals of Imperial Rome (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p. 326. (This corresponds to 14.27 in the original.)

[103]Hemer, p. 195.

The similarity of the Laodiceans to the Israelites in prophetic times, their lack of awareness of their need for the prophetic oracle and their self-satisfied manner make the quoting of their claims, "You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing'", an appropriate and rhetorically powerful means of highlighting their dire spiritual need.

By demonstrating that he knows (via powerful divine revelation) what his errant audience are thinking and saying behind his back the prophet who uses Disputation Speech regains the upper hand in the moral/religious struggle. In revealing this knowledge through the quotation both the Old Testament prophets and John of Patmos assert their authority over their flock by the use of a rhetorical device.

c. Restoration and Rejection Themes

Threats of rejection by God of his people are to be found in a number of places in the Disputation Speech corpus. Some are couched in metaphors but most relate to loss of status and land; e.g. Isa 28:22 (nation destroyed by floods etc.); Jer 8:10 (stripped of property); Ezk 11:4, 7 (ejection from the city); and Hag 1:11 (drought). Such threats of punishment and rejection are to be expected, as a broken, or disintegrating, relationship is naturally part of the background to the issuing of such prophetic speech acts as these.

However, the Disputation Speeches, and the material immediately following, also contain many promises of restoration. These have the rhetorical function of persuading the people to listen to the admonition of the prophet and make the behavioural changes necessary for restoring the broken relationship with God. A variety of colourful metaphors are employed to symbolise the restored relationship: e.g. Isa 40:31 (raised up on eagles wings); Isa 49:15 (a mother's love); Jer 31:31-34 (new

covenant motif); Jer 33:26 (restoration of the Davidic kingdom); Ezk 11:17-21 (restoration of land, law, and new heart); Ezk 18:21-22 (forgiveness); Ezk 37:12-13, (the famous 'breathing life into dry bones' metaphor).

At least two of the passages completely interweave the promise/restoration and threat/rejection elements. In Ezk 20:33-44 God 'threatens' to return the people to the land by force so as to confront them with their sins, in order that they will be so disgusted by them that they will submit to God restoring his relationship with them. The Disputation Speech of Ezk 33:10-20 intertwines promised rewards and punishments in a similar fashion.

As has been demonstrated above in Chapter Two (see especially pp. 99-100) the letters of Revelation 2-3 rhetorically utilise a promise and threat dynamic to enhance the persuasive power of their repentance calls in a 'carrot and stick' fashion. In the Laodicean letter, in particular, the main threat directed at the church is a very personal form of Divine rejection, being spat from God's mouth, Rev 3:16. The letter also contains the strongest restoration motif of the letters, the shared meal (probably eucharistic), leading on to the ultimate sign of approval and acceptance by God, the shared Divine throne (Rev 3:20-21). (For more on how this works rhetorically in the letter and the rest of the Apocalypse see above especially, pp. 119-124.)

Another notable similarity between the Hebrew prophets and John is the tenderness of God's restoration language as voiced in the narrative. (This is often highlighted by the potential sudden violence of rejection also present in the immediate context.) An example of this tenderness is in the Disputation Speech of Jer 31:29-30. "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel . . . I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people"

(Jer 31:33). The tone of Rev 3:20 is strikingly similar, "I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to be with them and eat with them, and they will eat with me." Physical contact between God and his people in a sensory situation (like the meal), is a common feature of the promised restoration.

A final factor that is of interest here relates to the Second Exodus context of the Prophets and Revelation. Those churches that are called to repent in Revelation 2-3 have lapsed into pagan compromise and need to return to an earlier, purer form of religious practice (Rev 2:5). This repentance is usually informed by the model of the Jews' return to Jerusalem from Babylon in order to re-establish the Davidic kingdom. This concept was explored in Chapter Two, (above, pp. 86f). The significance here is that, as Graffy shows, all but one of the Disputation Speeches in the Prophets were given either just before the Exile or during the restoration from it.[104] This was of course a time when for the prophets at least the restoration of the Davidic kingdom was a prime concern. The urgent question of rejection or acceptance by God was crucial and time was of the essence. After the Exile the Second Exodus was exactly what the prophets were assisting the people in accomplishing.

d. Other Parallels

A number of Disputation Speeches contain, or occur in proximity to, references to the creation act and God's sovereign rulership as creator.[105] For instance the Disputation Speech found in Isa 40:27-31 is preceded by a twenty verse creation pericope that describes God's authority over his creation. Then within the Disputation Speech itself God is called "the creator of the ends of the earth" (Isa 40:28). Creation

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[104]Graffy, p. 119.
[105]Ibid., p. 123.

references also occur within the Disputation Speech of Jer 33:23-26; precede the Disputation Speech of Isa 28:14-19 at 28:9; and complement the Disputation Speech of Jer 31:29-30 at 31:35.

Creation is an important theme in the Apocalypse,[106] as shown by such passages as Rev 4:11, 14:7 and 21:1-5. Like its Old Testament counterparts the Disputation Speech of the Laodicean letter also contains a strong creation motif which stresses the authority of Christ and the creatorship of God.[107] In Rev 3:14 Christ is introduced as *ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς κτίσεως τοῦ θεοῦ*, a phrase that is evocative of the Hebrew Bible, especially Isaiah.[108] The Old Testament prophets who used the Disputation Speech device always addressed an audience that had lost respect for God, as evidenced by their boastful mockery. The prophet uses the creation motif, or reference, to begin the process of restoring the authority of God in a community that must relearn its place in creation's divine order.[109]

In at least one respect, Rev 3:14b-19 is a more distinct use of the prophetic Disputation Speech form than is Matt 5:21-48. This is because in Revelation the quotation element actually does come from the mouths of the people, at least rhetorically if not literally. That is, the quotation is used as evidence to condemn its source. This is not what Jesus is depicted as doing in Matthew 5. Rather, the Matthean Jesus uses the phrase "You have heard that it was said" (Matt 5:27) to refer to

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[106]Bauckham, The Theology of the Book of Revelation, pp. 47-53 and pp. 163-164.

[107]Beasley-Murray, p. 104.

[108]G K Beale, "The Old Testament Background of Rev 3:14", New Testament Studies 42 (1996), pp. 137-146. Aune, Revelation 1-5, pp. 256-257, discusses its possible dependence on a selection of passages in Proverbs. The phrase's similarity and possible dependence on Col 1:15 & 18 is noted by most commentators.

[109]Related connections can be observed here between return from exile (Second Exodus) themes, calls to repentance and a restored creation motif. Wright notes that this linkage is often made in biblical literature. Wright, p. 428.

traditional rabbinical material, or even material from the Torah, that is being misused by people in an attempt to avoid the spirit of the law. Jesus does not contradict what he has quoted. Rather, he builds on it, extending its application.[110] (See also the discussion above, p. 194).

It should also be mentioned that the saying of the people quoted by the prophet in the Disputation Speech does not need to be long. They are all terse sayings and seldom longer than a single verse. In the Septuagint Jer 8:8 is nine words in length, Jer 33:24 is ten, Ezk 11:3 is thirteen, Ezk 12:22 is only five, Ezk 18:2 is ten, Ezk 20:32 is fifteen, Ezk 37:11 is ten, Isa 49:14 is eight and Hag 1:2 is nine. The Laodicean quotation is eight words in length. Its length, therefore, is quite consistent with the Disputation Speech form as it normally occurs in the prophets.

It might be a somewhat subjective process to make a judgement regarding the credibility of the sayings quoted. There is really no way of knowing whether these jibes and cynical remarks were actually made by individuals or groups in the communities addressed by the prophets. However, with regard to credibility Graffy is confident that:

> Both quotation and rejoinders are always true to life and credible, though their absolute authenticity as quotations of the people must remain open to question. They provide a genuine source of information regarding the ministry of the prophets . . . and the attitudes they had to face.[111]

The Laodicean quotation is also a true to life expression of human attitudes in this respect. It mirrors the culture and history of its purported origins, the wealthy city of

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[110]Davies and Allison, pp. 504-509.
[111]Graffy, p.120.

Laodicea with its finance industry and independence from Roman charity.[112] It is the kind of thing that wealthy self-made people have always said, in their demeanour at least, if not with their mouths. It applies universally to self-sufficient communities wherever they are encountered.[113] It sounds like a credible example of human nature and rings true in the ears of the reader in the same way as the behaviour of the rich farmer of Luke 12:16f does.

## 6. The Link Between Disputation Speech and Repentance

As the emphasis of this study is repentance call models, the relationship between Disputation Speech and repentance needs now to be explored. Disputation Speech is used by the Old Testament prophets "to transform the hearts of the people, to lead them to an awareness of their guilt and to secure trust in God."[114] In other words it is frequently employed for the purpose of persuading the audience to repentance. I would contend that this also applies to the Baptist's use of quoting his audience.

It is significant that a contextual reading of the Old Testament Disputation Speeches that Graffy identifies reveals that most occur in conjunction with calls to repentance, or repentance imagery. For example the refutation in the Disputation Speech that occurs in Ezk 33:10-20 contains a pleading call to turn from wickedness.

> Say to them, 'As I live says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but (rather) that the wicked turn from their ways and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel?' (Ezk 33:11)

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[112] Hemer, pp. 191-196.
[113] Guthrie, The Relevance of John`s Apocalypse, pp. 83-85.
[114] Graffy, p. 129.

The refutation continues by describing the consequence of turning, *ἀποστρέφειν* (LXX), either to God or away from him. Other Disputation Speeches are partly responsible for repentance occurring amongst the prophet's audience, such as Hag 1:2-11. Those Disputation Speeches that display 'repentance' characteristics most strongly are listed below, along with the relationship they have to a repentance call, or passage, which is either within the Disputation Speech itself or within contextual proximity.

| **Disputation Speech** | **Repentance Passage(s)** | **Relationship between Disputation Speech and Repentance Passage** |
|---|---|---|
| Jer 8:8-9 | Jer 8:4-7 | The Disputation Speech is given as an example of the refusal to repent. |
| Jer 31:29-30 | Jer 31:16-22 | This Disputation Speech reflects the results of the repentance that is called for in vss. 21-22, and promised, vss. 18-19. |
| Jer 33:23-26 | Jer 33:2-7 & 34:15 | The Disputation Speech is an example of God's faithfulness to his covenant despite Israel's refusal to call (in a spirit of repentance) upon him, Jer 33:3, and their apostasy from a recent act of repentance, Jer 34:15. |
| Ezk 11:14-17 | Ezk 11:17-20 | The refutation contains a prophecy that God will cause Israel to return to him, vs. 18, and receive hearts of flesh, vs. 20. |
| Ezk 18:1-20 | Ezk 18:21-32 | Examples of repentance and its results, which share a number of literary motifs with the Disputation Speech, follow immediately after it. These examples end in a strong and repeated call to repent, vss. 30-32. |
| Ezk 20:32-44 | Ezk 20:39-40 | The Disputation Speech contains a prediction of repentance in the refutation, vss. 39-40. |
| Ezk 33:10-20 | Ezk 33:1-9, 11 | A symbolic warning about the consequence of ignoring a call to repentance, and of refusing to make that call, immediately precedes the Disputation Speech, vss. 1-9. |
| Hag 1:2-11 | Hag 1:12-14 | The Disputation Speech calls directly for repentance within the refutation. This causes repentance in the people, the governor and the high priest, vss. 12-14. |

In addition, two repentance oriented Disputation Speeches have parallels with the Laodicean letter at a more detailed level. Firstly in the Jer 8:8-9 Disputation Speech the audience boasts, like Laodicea, about having what it needs. The quoted speech is

"we are wise, for we have the law of God," (Jer 8:8) which parallels the Laodiceans' attitude "I am rich and I have acquired wealth and I have no need of anything" (Rev 3:17). Neither audience believes that they have abandoned God and both seem supremely self-assured in their spiritual standing. Nevertheless they are unaware of the self-deception they have practised and the foolishness and falseness of their boasting.

Secondly there is a similarity between Revelation 3 and a refutation in the Disputation Speech of Hag 1:2-11. Here the similar use of motif and metaphor is worth noting. Thus:

> You have sown much, and harvested little; you eat, but you never have enough; you drink, but you never have your fill; you clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; and you that earn wages earn wages to put them into a bag with holes. (Hag 1:6)

In other words they have acquired little wealth, are hungry, thirsty, effectively naked, and penniless despite futile efforts to the contrary. This makes Haggai's audience very similar to the Laodiceans who say "I am rich and I have acquired wealth and I have no need of anything" but who are dangerously unaware that they are "the wretchedest; pitiful, poor, blind and naked" (Rev 3:17). Again the two audiences are similar in their self-delusion, self-sufficiency and also in their lack-lustre attitude towards their religious responsibility. The Laodiceans are spiritually lukewarm and Haggai's audience do not acknowledge their need to rebuild the temple. Neither group are overtly wicked or idolatrous, just deluded and spiritually idle. The metaphorical use of finance and clothing in both Old and New Testament Disputation Speeches is surely more than just a coincidence at this point and indicates John's deliberate usage of this prophetic form.

## 7. Conclusions on Disputation Speech

It seems highly probable therefore that John chose the Disputation Speech as a structural model for his letter to the Laodiceans because it suited their situation so well. It was the ideal rhetorical tool for the job. By throwing their own words and attitudes back in their faces and refuting them with Divine authority, John sought to strengthen his appeal for repentance amongst them; repentance, that is, from self-sufficiency and self-delusion. John probably choose to use this literary device because it was used in similar crisis situations (in proximity to the Exile) and to similar audiences by his primary Old Testament source Ezekiel[115] and others. The promise/restoration and punishment/rejection structure of many of the Disputation Speeches would also have appealed to John. As a device which highlights the tragedy and potential of broken, but restorable, covenant relationships, and allows the tenderness and fierceness of God's voice to be blended so appropriately, it is significantly powerful.[116]

The use of a similar quotation device by the Baptist may also have influenced the Seer. The literary device of Disputation Speeches is, however, a paradigm which John deliberately used as a repentance call model. Despite having to fit into the tight literary controlling pattern of the letters as a whole the Disputation Speech form can still be clearly detected and retains the essential elements of the classical form.

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[115]Mazzaferri, p. 41, points out that twenty five percent of the Old Testament 'quotations' in Revelation come from Ezekiel. He goes on to show how John uses Ezekiel as a structural and generic model, passim, but especially pp. 364-365. See also the useful bar chart in Moyise, p. 16, which compares the frequency of Revelation's usage of Old Testament books.

[116]The quoting of the words of the 'whore' in Rev 18:7 may be influenced by the Disputation Speech device. There is a link between her claims and the judgement predicted in Rev 18:8 and her claim is defiant and self-satisfied as in many examples of the form's use. There is also a Divine Speech introduction, i.e. Rev 18:4. However, the 'refutation' is not addressed to her, nor does it offer any chance of repentance, but is stated as a condemnation or judgement. This probably puts this pericope too far from the traditional format of the Hebrew Disputation Speech, but further research in this area might prove highly interesting.

## E. Other Influences on the Repentance Motifs in Rev 3:14-21

Other factors and sources which influence the repentance preaching and imagery of Rev 3:14-21 involve a subtle reapplication of Old Testament material chosen for its powerful imagery and resonance.

### 1. Purchasing

In Rev 3:18 the act of repentance is depicted in terms of purchasing gold, white clothes and eye-salve (*κολλούριον*). These symbols of the fruits of zealous repentance are often shown by commentators[117] to have been chosen by John because of their importance to the local economy. This is no doubt correct, but there is more to John's use of these metaphors than that. Depicting spiritual return and revival through the symbolic buying of that which one lacks occurs in Isa 55:1-2:

> Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labour on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare.

Jesus uses the same symbolism of purchasing in the parable of the wise and foolish virgins, Matt 25:9-10. But as Hemer points out the emphasis in Rev 3:18 is *παρ' ἐμοῦ*.[118] Christ is the only source or purveyor of the remedy. No purveyor is actually specified in Isa 55:1-2 or Matt 25:9-10, though of course one is implied.

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[117]E.g. Sweet, p. 108; Caird, p. 56; and the fuller treatment in Hemer, pp. 196-201.
[118]Hemer, p. 196.

## 2. Refining of Metal

Another repentance motif which occurs in Rev 3:18 is passing through fire to achieve refinement, repentance or restoration. This has a number of possible antecedents in prophetic literature, as well as the link with John the Baptist already mentioned above, (p. 177). In Isa 1:25, Zech 13:9 and Mal 3:3 God's redeeming of his wayward people is symbolised in terms of the refining of precious metal. But if these are influences on John's repentance call he has adapted them significantly. In each of the above it is the redeemed that are symbolised by the refined metal.

In Rev 3:18, however, the refined metal symbolises something more abstract, something to be obtained only from God, possibly even salvation itself.[119] The refined and molten metals of the 'Merkavah' vision of Ezekiel 1 may also be sources. A parallel allusion to the refining of gold in 1 Peter 1:7 shows that this imagery was part of the symbolic currency of the early church.

## 3. Three-fold Micro Structure

The actual call to repent, found in Rev 3:19, exhibits a fairly distinctive structure amongst biblical calls to repentance. It is comprised of three basic elements. First Christ tells them that "I rebuke and I discipline all those whom I love" as an explanation of the discipline that has just been prescribed in the previous verse. They are then given the command *ζήλευε* which is connected to the explanation via *οὖν*. Verse 19 then concludes with a second direct command, the actual call *μετανόησον*. *Ζηλεύειν*, *παιδεύειν* and *ἐλέγχειν* are all unique words within Revelation, not occurring anywhere other than here in the entire book. John places the command *μετανόησον* in a string of commands on two

other occasions within the letters. Ephesus is commanded to *μνημόνευε . . . καὶ μετανόησον καὶ . . . ποίησον*, Rev 2:5. Sardis is commanded to *μνημόνευε . . . καὶ τήρει, καὶ μετανόησον*, Rev 3:3. Apart from these two examples there would appear to be no other parallels or antecedents for this micro-structure of Rev 3:19.

## 4. Chastening and Restoring

Finally, the possible theological parallels and antecedents of the phrase "I rebuke and I discipline all those whom I love" (Rev 3:19a), need to be discussed. God chastening those whom he loves is a relatively common theme in both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament.[120] However, a very close relationship between love, discipline and repentance is to be found in Jer 31:18-20. The subject of the discipline is Ephraim, who says, "You disciplined me (*ἐπαιδεύθην ἐγώ* LXX[121]) like an unruly calf and I have been disciplined" (Jer 31:18a). He then pleads "Restore me and I will return (*ἐπίστρεψόν με, καὶ ἐπιστρέψω*)" (Jer 31:18b). Then he claims "For after I had turned away I repented (*μετενόησα*); and after I was discovered, I struck my thigh;" (Jer 31:19a).

It is evident in Jer 31:20 that the discipline of God was administered in love, "Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he the child I delight in?" It is certainly possible that this prophetic oracle might have served as source material for Rev 3:19. The reformatory experience of Ephraim is the one that John wishes the Laodiceans to undergo. Significantly this passage in Jeremiah precedes a Disputation Speech (Jer 31:29-30).

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[119]See for instance Beasley Murray, p. 106, Charles, ICC Commentary Vol. I, p. 98. However, A Y Collins, The Apocalypse, p. 30, sees it as witness and suffering.

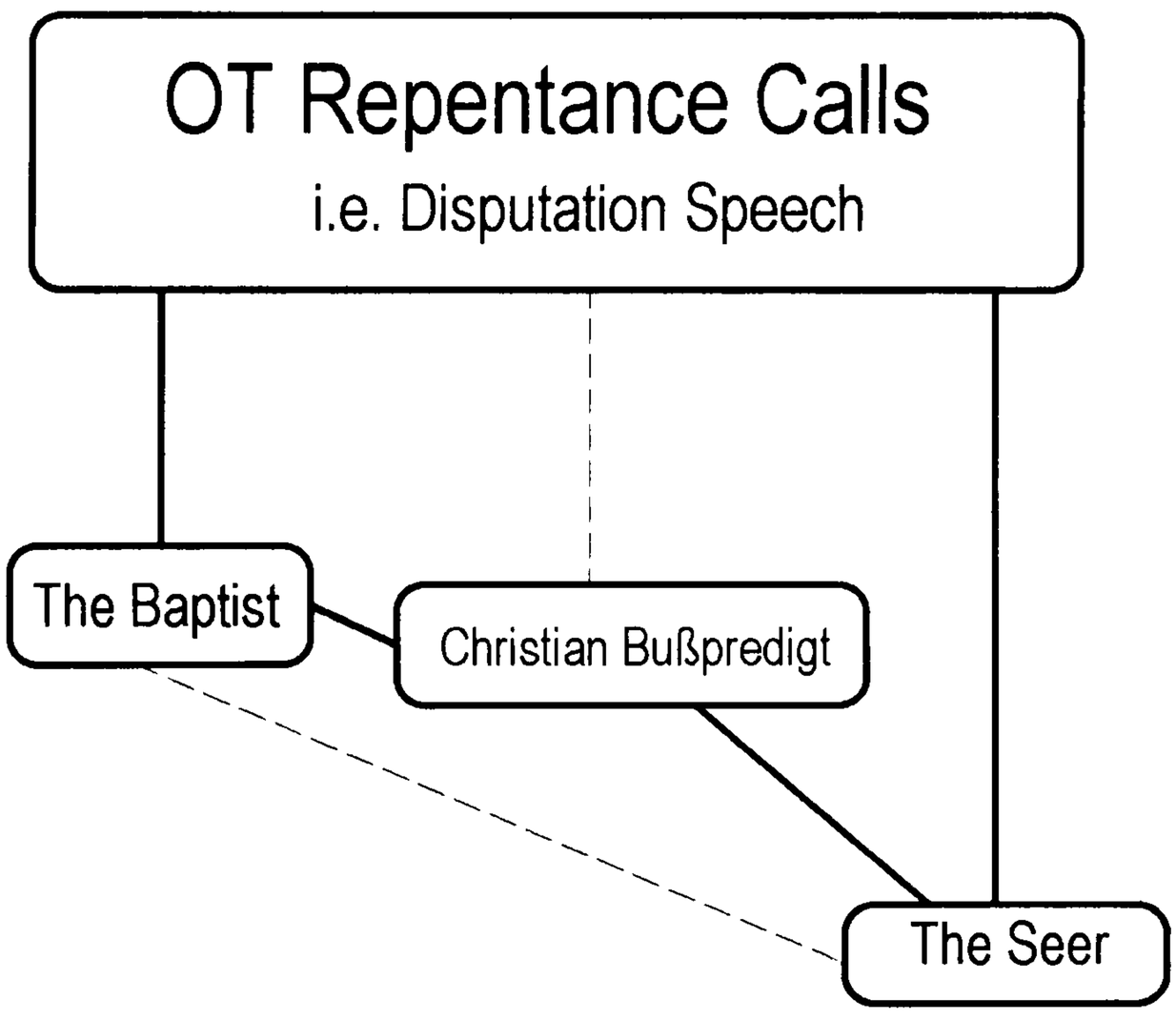
[120]E.g. Heb 12:5-11; Ps 94:12-14; Prov 3:11-12.

[121]In the Septuagint Jeremiah 38 corresponds with Jeremiah 31 in modern English versions of the Hebrew Bible.

## F. Conclusions on Models and Paradigms

In the call to repentance made in the letter to the Laodicean church, John uses Old Testament form and material informed by Christian method. From the Old Testament it is primarily the Major Prophets that are represented in his choice of language and metaphor, as is to be expected.[122] From the more immediate Christian background it seems that the Seer was aware of the type of repentance calls that were made by the Baptist and Jesus. All three were doubtless influenced by similar Old Testament models and sources.

The relationship between these literary or oral sources can be depicted in diagrammatic form, thus:




For the Laodicean letter the most prominent paradigm, from a literary and structural perspective, is the Disputation Speech of the classical prophets. In this specialised literary motif John evidently found a powerful tool for persuading the self-satisfied Laodiceans to repent. The emphasis within Disputation Speeches on creation

motifs, mirrored as it is in the Christological introduction passage (Rev 3:14), puts the Laodiceans in their place by re-emphasising their true condition of needy dependence. From John's pastoral perspective it assists him in achieving his primary task.

The fact that John uses the Disputation Speech pattern only in this particular letter helps to demonstrate that this was a real church situation.[123] Although the Laodiceans may not have literally uttered the precise words that John quotes, the quotation certainly encapsulates the attitude of the church.[124] He knew that by quoting them he would be delivering a stinging reproof.

The use of the Disputation Speech form by the classical prophets, by the Baptist and possibly even Jesus, for similar situations and similar audiences, shows that John was aware that he was proclaiming a message that, "stands firmly in the prophetic tradition."[125] He would also have been certain that the literary form he chose would elicit the desired response in his audience thanks to their familiarity with the Hebrew scriptures and its innate credibility.

It is indicative of John's genius that he does this without breaking the overall structural pattern that he uses to shape each of the seven letters. The fact that he only uses the disputation speech form once shows that he did not feel constrained by any motif or model gleaned from his sources. The most important structures are those he has devised himself and the most important message is that which he has received and been commissioned to deliver. John was master of his sources, applying and adapting them

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[122]Mazzaferri, p 41f, demonstrates that thirty percent of Revelation's Old Testament material is from the Major Prophets and that these are the most important to his theme and purpose.

[123]For a different emphasis, that the letters are primarily a scriptural composite designed to represent all Christian experience with little interest in addressing the named churches, see the discussion in Moyise, pp. 24-44. However, Hemer at least is convinced that there is evidence in the text of the letters that John is addressing spiritual needs that are specific to each church separately, p. 48.

[124]Graffy, p. 119.

with the style, skill and precision of an inspired prophet and an artful pastor who sought to persuade his audience to repent with the most effective means at his disposal.

[125]Rowland, Radical Christianity, p. 82.

# Chapter Four

## A Seventeenth-Century Interpretation of Rev 3:14-22: The Dynamics of Actually Being Laodicea

### A. Introduction

The underlying concern of this work is the call to repentance made in the Laodicean letter and its effect on the reader. By analysing historical "reader-responses" selected from its history of interpretation some of the reader-author dynamics that operate within the text of the Apocalypse will become apparent.

The interpretive communities that will be investigated in this chapter and the next, have been chosen because they believed themselves specifically to be identified and addressed by the prophecies of Revelation, particularly the Laodicean "prophecy" which makes a powerful call to repentance. By viewing the call that John makes from the perspective of actual audience reception, the dynamics and influential power of the text will become evident. The history of its influence upon those communities, that is its "*Wirkungsgeschichte*"[1], will also be examined. As this is incorporated into the thesis it will facilitate the following of a long stream of influence, or continuum, in religious thought from Hebrew prophecy, through apocalyptic literature, the Baptist, and Christian interpretive communities.

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[1]See the discussion of history of influence above pp. 23f.

A call to repentance is a natural place to explore the dynamic relationship between Scripture and audience. For here it is certain that the author did intend to elicit a clearly defined response and a dynamic change in his or her audience. The examples of interpretation within communities selected here will help in the understanding of the power a text has to interact with its audience and to draw out desired responses.

When a community accepts a text as "Scripture" the call for change and repentance cannot be ignored. The communities examined below were convinced that they were being specifically (or even exclusively) addressed by the Laodicean repentance call. Addressed, that is, in a way and with a prophetic directness that had not happened since the audience of Asia Minor first received John's letter in the first century. However, such a call may be adapted or transferred. Those receiving the message can deflect it onto another group or sub-group and thereby shift their rhetorical position in the narrative from that of the reader to that of the writer. By identifying with the implied writer they direct his call to those they deem to be in particular need of receiving the castigation. This type of response to the text will also be demonstrated.

## 1. Period of Interpretive Interest

In late sixteenth-century England a strain of prophetic interpretation developed in Puritan literature which extended the Historicist[2] interpretation of Revelation to include the application of the message of the Laodicean letter directly to contemporary English society and the state church. Those who followed this school believed that England truly was the Laodicea addressed in Rev 3:14-22.

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[2]For a description of historicism see above. pp. 33-39. It will also be expanded upon below.

According to this novel interpretive scheme the seven churches of Revelation 2-3 were prophetic correlations of seven epochs of church history. The text of the messages to the churches described each period, from Christ's ascension to his eschatological return. Careful calculations of the time prophecies of Daniel and Revelation established that time was almost at an end and thus the last of the seven epochs, as described in the Laodicean letter, had begun. This caused those who accepted this interpretive scheme to have a dynamic response to the message of the letter, particularly the call to repent within it. This interpretive scheme was widely and strongly adhered to by the middle of the seventeenth century and continued to be utilised by a significant minority of Protestants right into the nineteenth century. It is still to be found, with all its corresponding *Wirkungsgeschichte*, in subsequent fundamentalist movements including the Seventh-day Adventist church. (The history of influence of the Laodicean pericope within early Seventh-day Adventism will be explored in the next chapter.)

## 2. Historicism

Before going further it may be helpful to shed some light on the attitude to scripture, history and prophecy in the late Tudor period. In the late sixteenth century Protestant commentators tended to interpret biblical prophecy as being primarily concerned with predicting the future and present, rather than describing the past, for example the biblical author's own time. The prophetic passages of Scripture, especially Daniel and Revelation, were of central importance to most scholars and churchmen. God was seen to be personally active in human history, directing individuals and events in order to influence the outcome of the ongoing battle between the forces of good and the

forces of the Antichrist. All the world was divided between these two camps, or "churches", and had been throughout history.[3]

Political events were interpreted in spiritual terms by military, religious and political leaders alike, the prime example of the late sixteenth century being the Armada of 1588 (see below p. 254). "Englishmen believed the defeat of the Armada to have been a genuinely miraculous divine intervention. . . . The war with Spain was specifically understood in religious terms."[4] The Armada was understood to be a partial fulfilment of the prophecy of Armageddon in one popular commentary on Revelation.[5] Other political and social events were similarly viewed.

The most common scheme among Protestants for the interpretation of biblical apocalyptic was therefore the historicist scheme.[6] Historicism (see also above, p. 33) viewed Daniel and Revelation as prophetic outlines of human history, starting from the time of the biblical author and reaching down to the Last Judgement. Significant events in human history, especially those relevant to the cosmic battle, were predicted in Scripture. The great schemes and conspiracies of the Devil and his agents were also revealed. The more historical events and individuals a writer or preacher could 'discover' in the text the more scholarly he was considered to be.[7] Modern interpreters may find such prophetic 'fulfilments' alien, but it should be remembered that the best minds of the sixteenth century, scholars who had faced exile and death, trusted and

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[3]Bauckham, Tudor Apocalypse, pp. 54-60.
[4]Ibid., p. 173.
[5]Arthur Dent, The Ruine of Rome (London:1603), p. 218.
[6]Bauckham, Tudor Apocalypse, p. 15.
[7]This is not to say that scholarly criteria were not adhered to, or that wild speculation was not criticised by the academic community of the day.

employed the historicist hermeneutic.[8] They had faith in a system whose pedigree went back through Foxe and Luther,[9] to the great pre-reformation scholars such as Albertus Magnus and Abbot Joachim of Fiore.[10]

Joachim, the most influential and original of medieval interpreters of Revelation, was the first substantial writer to develop the idea that separate eras of Christian history, from Pentecost to the Parousia, were predicted in the seven seals of Revelation 6-8.[11] This idea was widely accepted and subsequently the seven trumpets of Revelation 8-11 and the seven bowls of Revelation 15-16 were also interpreted as predictions of the future. This was introduced into the English apocalyptic tradition by Bishop John Bale (1495-1563), whose commentary on the Apocalypse[12] was the first to be written in English and had an immense impact upon Protestant thinking. It has been called the most important book of scriptural interpretation produced in the English Reformation.[13] Bale's unique contribution was the idea that historical research and apocalyptic exegesis should be interwoven. Through Bale, Joachim's belief that "Revelation expressed a continuous history of the Church and the hope of a further improvement to that Church within human history"[14] was firmly grounded in English thinking. Foxe's Book of Martyrs owed its inspiration in great part to Bale as did all English writers who saw in Revelation a vision of their own time and circumstances.

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[8]As Firth indicates they usually also had great faith in biblical chronology and the predictive sequence of ages and dates that were generated from it. C Firth, The Apocalyptic Tradition in Reformation Britain 1530-1645 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 183-184.

[9]Luther had used his version of historicist interpretation of Daniel and Revelation to "place the Reformation in the final years of history," Ibid., p. 12.

[10]Bauckham, Tudor Apocalypse, pp. 30-31.

[11]Firth, p. 41. On Joachim's interpretation of Revelation and its influence see B McGinn, The Calabrian Abbot: Jaochim of Fiore in the History of Western Thought (London: Macmillan, 1985), pp. 205f.

[12]John Bale, The Image of bothe Churches after the moste wonderfull and heavenly Revelacion of Sainct John the Evangelist (London: 1548).

[13]Bauckham, Tudor Apocalypse, pp. 22-24.

With the aid of historicism the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation were used to demonstrate, amongst other things, that the Papacy was the Anti-Christ, that Queen Elizabeth was the pure woman of Revelation 12[15] and that the Millennium (Rev 20:2) was beginning.[16] Historicism helped give biblical justification to the polemic that developed between Catholic and Protestant and its affiliated violence. It also helped Protestants come to terms with persecution. "To the suffering the time of persecution might seem long, but the time periods of the Apocalypse showed . . . that it was limited in the providence of God and short in the perspective of eternity."[17] Popular preachers and scholars like Bale and Foxe both believed that contemporary events were foretold by the biblical apocalypses. Essentially "prophecy was the history of the future."[18] It was partly due to this that the study of history emerged as a separate academic discipline, having previously been primarily a subsidiary of rhetoric.[19]

The interpretation of biblical prophecy was considered a matter of socio-political significance in late sixteenth and seventeenth-century England, with Revelation in particular being strongly linked to English national identity.[20] James VI of Scotland (England's James I) wrote a historicist tract on Revelation[21], and the mathematician John Napier[22] (the inventor of logarithms) considered his work on biblical prophecy to be of greater importance than the work for which he is now remembered.

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[14]Firth, p. 5.

[15]E.g. Edward Hellwis, A Marvell Deciphered: An Exposition of the Twelfth Chapter of Revelation (London: 1589), especially pp. 5-8. See also Bauckham, Tudor Apocalypse, p. 179.

[16]Views on the Millennium tended to be divided between post-millennialists who believed Christ would come after, or during a period of earthly spiritual regeneration, and pre-millennialists who believed that a cataclysmic second coming of Christ would usher in a 1000 years of divine rule.

[17]Bauckham, Tudor Apocalypse, p. 117.

[18]Firth, p. 184.

[19]Ibid., pp. 178-179.

[20]B McGuinn, "Revelation", in Alter and Kermode, p. 535.

[21]Published in The Works of the Most High and Mighty Prince James (London: 1616).

[22]John Napier, A Plain Discovery of the Whole of Revelation (Edinburgh: 1593).

## 3. Origins of the Prophetic-Historical Interpretation of the Seven Churches

No interpreters of Revelation saw specifically predictive material in the letters to the seven churches (Rev 2:1-3:22) until Thomas Brightman in the 1590s. The origin and development of any scheme of biblical interpretation, especially one that is a minority view or anti-establishment, is seldom easy to trace. It is only with some caution that one would attribute the origin of an interpretive scheme to a specific author. However, it is difficult to do otherwise with the historicist interpretation of the seven churches. There is nothing to indicate that Revelation 2-3 was ever viewed as prophetic, in the historicist sense, before the writings of Brightman in the late sixteenth century (see below p. 229).

Froom, in his extensive history of the interpretation of Revelation and Daniel, claims to have found hints of a prophetic application of the churches in medieval scholars such as Richard of St. Victor (d. 1173) and Bede,[23] but admits that no one developed the idea fully before Brightman. Before this Revelation 2-3 was seen as a non-prophetic prelude to John's visions. The letters were interpreted as either applying just to the actual churches of Asia Minor, and thus of little relevance to the modern reader, or more commonly, as a spiritual message that incorporated all aspects of religious experience. In Napier's commentary for example a note appears between the exegesis of Rev 3:22 and Rev 4:1: "Here endeth the first part of this booke, concerning the particular admonitions to the seven Churches. Now followeth the general Discourse to the worldes end."[24]

Although it is evident that Brightman invented the scheme it is useful to analyse its precursors and understand the climate that allowed it to become so popular.

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[23]L E Froom, The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers, Vol. I (Washington DC: Review & Herald, 1948), pp. 558 and 612. His evidence for this is weak.

Extrapolation from Joachim's schemes of seven historic periods (referred to above p. 222) produced much of the apocalyptic hope of the Middle Ages and much of the highly specific Puritan interpretation of Revelation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[25] It was only a matter of time before, for the sake of completeness, Revelation's first series of seven would be seen as a prophetic representation of the Christian church.

The scheme of 'prophetic recapitulation' used on Daniel by reformers like Luther and Melanchthon[26] would also have been influential. Pre-Reformation use of recapitulation is found as early as the first extant Latin commentary of Revelation by Victorinus in the early fourth century.[27] Recapitulation is the hermeneutical scheme in which two prophecies (Daniel 2 and Daniel 7 for instance) are applied to the same period of history. The second passage adds greater detail to the events revealed by the first.[28] Inevitably this attractive idea came into Protestant interpretations of Revelation.[29]

Those who employed recapitulation in their interpretation of apocalyptic may well have felt that it was wasteful for Revelation to begin with a series of seven that was not prophetic. (Seven being replete with prophetic power and knowledge.) Why not picture the seven churches as a prophetic overview of the time period detailed by the rest of Revelation? The subsequent prophetic series of sevens then recapitulated the period, revealing it in ever increasing detail. A scholar like Brightman could then show

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[24]Napier, p. 98.

[25]M Reeves, Joachim of Fiore and the Prophetic Future (London: SPCK, 1976), pp. 116-165. Reeves believes that Brightman "stands clearly in the Joachimist tradition", p. 155. See also Firth, pp. 4-5.

[26]Froom, Vol. II, pp. 266-273. See also his useful table of leading sixteenth-century interpreters' views of recapitulation and historicist fulfilment in Daniel and Revelation, Ibid., pp. 528-531.

[27]Ibid., Vol. I, p. 460.

[28]On the uses and analysis of recapitulation in Revelation see C H Giblin, "Recapitulation and the Literary Coherence of John's Apocalypse", Catholic Biblical Quarterly 56 (1994): 81-95.

the true place of the churches in the historicist interpretation of Revelation, because they "contained in concise form the entire message of the Revelation . . . which was amplified by all the later visions."[30]

A counter-reformation factor must also be considered. In order to rebut Protestant claims that biblical prophecy proved the Pope was Antichrist, Catholic exegetes such as Ribera, Alcazar and Cardinal Bellarmine interpreted Revelation as virtually all future or all past.[31] The result of these 'futurist' and 'preterist' interpretations was that Revelation had little contemporary relevance. To counter this Protestants needed to reassert and strengthen the historicist interpretation. A specific desire to refute preterism and futurism in Catholic commentaries was the motivation for more than one Protestant commentary on Revelation.[32] Before Brightman, the seven letters were a Protestant concession to preterism. Hence the development of an historicist interpretation of Revelation 2-3 would have served to counter the Catholic attack on historicism.

Also to be considered is the influence of material like that of Heinrich Bullinger, which was then popular in England.[33] Bullinger's view, that in the letters "all is showed, what is or shall be, the disposition, manner and virtues of all the churches in the whole

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[29]This is found in embryonic form in Bale where the seven seals and the seven trumpets are paralleled, (see Firth, p. 44). Dent perceives a full recapitulation between the trumpets and vials. On 'recapitulation' in biblical prophecy see B McGinn, "Revelation" in Alter and Kermode, pp. 523-541.

[30]B W Ball, A Great Expectation: Eschatological Thought in English Protestantism to 1660 (Leiden: E J Brill, 1975), p. 83.

[31]B W Ball, The English Connection (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1981), pp. 204-205; M Murrin, "Revelation and Two Seventeenth-Century Commentators" in Patrides and Wittreich, pp. 139-140, and B McGuinn, "Revelation", in Alter and Kermode, p. 538.

[32]P Christianson, Reformers and Babylon: English Apocalyptic Visions from the Reformation to the Eve of the Civil War (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), p. 100; Ball, A Great Expectation, p. 74; and Bauckham, Tudor Apocalypse, p. 140.

[33]Firth, p. 9.

world, and of all times and seasons"[34] would have gone some way to preparing Brightman's audience for his historicist exegesis of Revelation 2-3.

Some smaller factors should also be considered. As far back as Mary's reign persecution was interpreted as "divine chastisement for the C of E, a punishment for her sins which was not intended to be final but to bring her to repentance."[35] And John Bale had taught that "the programme of history outlined in the Apocalypse was further advanced in England than in most other places."[36] Equating England with Laodicea was not completely unknown in Elizabethan times either, as this incident clearly shows:

> A Puritan of Bury St. Edmunds . . . caused to be inscribed below the Royal Arms in his parish church the words from the Book of Revelation 'Because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.' He was hanged for his pains.[37]

Of course if this was common thinking among Puritans, this event shows why it is rarely expressed in their early printed material.

It is also possible that the angel-prince that presides over the empires in Daniel 10 may have suggested the idea that the churches, which each have a presiding angel, also represents various ages. Sixteenth-century Protestant interpreters saw the empires of Daniel as progressive historical ages, and angels as representatives of a community.[38]

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[34]Heinrich Bullinger, An Hundred Sermons upon the Apocalyps of Jesu Christe (London: 1561), sig. *Avi*r. (No standard pagination.)

[35]Bauckham, Tudor Apocalypse, p. 127.

[36]Ibid., p. 72.

[37]P Collinson, The Birthpangs of Protestant England: Religious and Cultural Change in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries (London: Macmillan, 1988), pp. 15-16. Collinson does not give a date for this awful incident but he implies that it predates Brightman.

[38]Murrin, p. 132.

## B. The Work of Thomas Brightman

Thomas Brightman (1557-1607) is credited as the first to develop a systematic hermeneutic in which each of the seven churches was a prophetic representation of an era of Christian history.[39] Brightman was educated at Queen's College, Cambridge, where he gained his BA in 1580. He was a gifted scholar, receiving a fellowship in 1584, and his BD in 1591.[40] However, he then went into a life of relative obscurity in the country parish of Haynes (sometimes referred to as Hawnes) in Bedfordshire where he remained for the next sixteen years until his death. Brightman was evidently a celebrated preacher and scholar, who wrote in "most pure Latine."[41] His death was a great loss to the dissenting community who saw him as "a bright star in the church of God."[42] He also received the patronage and friendship of a number of Puritan nobles and influential publishers.[43]

During his lifetime Brightman had only a limited influence. His *magnum opus* on Revelation, Apocalypsis Apocalypseos was published abroad two years after his death,[44] and not published in England for another 35 years.[45] Internal evidence demonstrates he worked on it between 1589 and 1595.[46] However, Apocalypsis Apocalypseos was well known in England and Europe before its publication here. An English version was published in Leiden, a great centre of radical theological publishing, and by 1616 was in

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[39]e.g. Firth, p. 166, and Christianson, pp. 100-102.

[40]J F Wilson, Pulpit in Parliament (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 215.

[41]Thomas Fuller, The Church History of Britain (London: 1656), Vol. X, pp. 49-50.

[42]Edward Leigh, Religion and Learning (London: 1656), p. 143.

[43]J T Cliffe, The Puritan Gentry (London: Routledge, 1984), p. 186; Fuller, Vol. X, p. 50.

[44]Brightman's Latin original was first published in Frankfurt in 1609 and Heidelberg in 1612. An English translation appeared in Amsterdam in 1611.

[45]Thomas Brightman, The Works of Thomas Brightman, A Revelation of the Apocalypse (London: 1644). This is the version that will be referred to throughout as "Brightman".

[46]At one point he refers to the crowning of Edward VI (1547) as occurring 42 years previously Ibid., pp. 125-126.

its third edition.[47] Many writers from the second decade of the century onward clearly appreciated Brightman's work and used his ideas freely in their own pamphlets and sermons.[48] Then significantly in the early 1640s, as the Civil War loomed, a number of popular tracts, summarising and quoting from his commentary (and declaring him to be a prophet), were published in large numbers. (On these see below, p. 246.)

His work became notorious for its criticism of the Church of England[49] and was, for that reason, unpublishable in Britain for forty years after it was written. However, Brightman had a great influence upon English politics and religion. This influence stems in a significant part from his historicist interpretation of the letters to the seven churches, particularly the Laodicean letter (Rev 3:14-22). This religious and political influence will be analysed below, after a closer examination of Brightman's historicist interpretation of the seven churches.

## 1. Brightman's Interpretation of the Seven Churches

Some of the factors that allowed the historicist interpretation of Revelation 2-3 to develop have been shown above. Although there is no evidence that it was already known to Brightman's audience, his hermeneutical scheme was therefore not unexpected. But significantly Brightman claims no previous scholarly support. Neither does he make any apology or give much explanation of how he has arrived at his new interpretation. However, because he "claimed to have been given some form of

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[47]Thomas Brightman, The Revelation of St. John Illustrated with an Analysis and Scholions, Third Edition (Leiden: John Claesson van Dorpe), 1616.

[48]Firth, pp. 228-229.

[49]B Capp, "The Political Dimensions of Apocalyptic Thought", in Patrides and Wittreich, pp. 100-101; Fuller, Vol. X, pp. 49-50.

enlightenment or spiritual understanding of the contents of the Johannine Apocalypse,"[50] he may have felt little need to apologise for the novelty of his exegesis. Brightman simply appeals to the logic of his readers, believing that his exegetical evidence alone would convince them. He then provides over 120 pages of highly detailed evidence in his interpretation of Revelation 2-3. Brightman begins by boldly declaring that the seven messages are obviously prophetic predictions of the seven eras of Christendom that occur between John's time and the end of the world.

> Ephesus is the first christian Church which, taking his beginning from the preaching of the Apostles, endured until the time of Constantine the great; as those things which are taught afterwards will plainly shew. This is the principle of all other churches, as Ephesus is the first of the seven cities.[51]

The next three churches follow on chronologically and together with Ephesus they parallel the periods of the first four seals (Rev 6:1-8). The chronology of the seals had entered the English apocalyptic tradition through Bale forty years before (see above, p. 222).[52] Despite much new thinking on other points of prophetic interpretation the dating of these periods was not too different from the first four seals in Joachim of Fiore's scheme.[53] There is also similar Joachimite emphasis on socio-political events providing the dates for change-over points between the ages, as opposed to dates with significant numerical values like 666 or 1000 AD etc.

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[50]P Toon, "The Latter-day Glory". in P Toon (ed.). Puritans, the Millennium and the Future of Israel: Puritan Eschatology 1600-1660 (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1970). p. 27.

[51]Brightman, p. 40.

[52]Firth, pp. 40-46.

[53]Reeves, pp. 152-154.

Brightman applies the churches to time periods as follows. Smyrna "takes her beginning together with Constantine . . . and is continued until Gratian, about the yeer of our Lord 382."[54] Pergamum represents 380 AD to 1300, and the Thyatiran letter is a prophecy of the period from 1300 to 1520.[55] Throughout these sections Brightman appeals to historical individuals, facts and events which he believes demonstrate the prophetic fulfilment of the letters.

Coming to the last three churches, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea, Brightman's scheme alters a little. The time periods represented by these churches are shorter. Unlike the first four they apply only to a limited geographical area of the Reformation. Although they start sequentially they continue to exist after the next one has begun. Sardis is the German church "begun by the special providence of God, by Martin Luther at Wittenburg . . . in the year 1517."[56] For fifteen pages Brightman details how Rev 3:1-6 is being fulfilled, by the German reformers both positively and negatively.[57] Philadelphia has its prophetic fulfilment in the "Church of Helutia (*sic*), Suevia, Geneva, France, Holland, Scotland."[58] Brightman believed that these Calvinist presbyterian churches were the ideal model for reformed Christianity and are therefore rightly represented by the church of brotherly love.

That left the seventh, last and worst of the churches, Laodicea. "The counterpaine (I say) of Laodicea, is the third reformed church, namely *Our Church of England.*"[59] The starting event and date that Brightman gives for this church is very

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[54]Brightman, p. 57.

[55]Ibid., pp. 64-75.

[56]Ibid., p. 91.

[57]E.g. Rev 3:5 "He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments." is fulfilled by the 1571 Synod of Dresda (*sic*) which stood firm and rejected "the ubiquity of the body of Christ." Ibid. p. 104.

[58]Ibid., p. 109.

[59]Ibid., p. 124. (His italics.) By 'counterpaine' he means prophetic fulfilment.

specific. "Now ours of England suteth (*sic*) with Laodicea the last of them, as whose beginning was last of all; which it took from the yeer M.D.XLVII."[60] (Edward VI was crowned in 1547.) Although Brightman acknowledges that it was Henry VIII who cut England's links with the Papacy he insists that the third reformed church had not started at that time because Henry had retained "the Popish Superstition."[61] He makes little attempt to hide his disappointment at the retention of episcopacy in the Church of England. Brightman's interpretation of the seven churches was used extensively for half a century by those who sought for presbyterian church government in England.[62] (On this see below, p. 246f).

Brightman is at pains to show his regret that the text draws him to these disturbing conclusions. "I have not with dry eyes taken a survey of this Laodicea. I could not but pour forth teares . . . when I beheld in it, Christ himself loathing us, and provoked extremely to anger against us." Significantly he recognises that it is the text itself which compels him and it must be obeyed. Hence "I durst not perfidiously bury the truth in silence, lest I should make myself accessory to so bloody a sin, as is the damnation of other mens souls."[63] Regret notwithstanding, he then continues for the next forty pages to give his interpretation of the message to Laodicea. In every aspect the text of Rev 3:14-22 is shown to be obviously applicable to the lukewarm spiritual condition of the people and church of his day.

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[60]Ibid., p. 125.
[61]Ibid.
[62]Christianson, pp. 100-106.
[63]Brightman, p. 124.

## 2. Brightman's Application of the Message to Laodicea

In this section Brightman's exegesis of Rev 3:14-22 will be examined in detail. Particular attention will be paid to how he applies the text of the letter, and its repentance call, to the society and church of his time. The subsequent section will cover the popularity and influence of Brightman and others who utilised this interpretive scheme. Two further sections will firstly analyse the dynamics of Brightman's exegesis, seeing how text and context interact, and finally explore the influence that this hermeneutical 'school' and its text had in the turbulent England of the 1640s. This approach will help develop a thorough understanding of the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of this particular interpretation of Rev 3:14-22 in seventeenth-century England.

Thomas Brightman was highly critical of the religious, political and social establishment of his day, believing that Scripture encouraged him in this criticism. However, he also found in Revelation reason to view England as a nation elect of God. Historians of the period believe that "the idea of England as an 'elect nation' fully entered systematic apocalyptic thought only with Brightman."[64] This paradoxical nationalism actually has its origin and justification to a great extent in his exegesis of the Laodicean letter. An understanding of this love-hate relationship is important when reading what follows and for understanding why his exegesis was both popular and powerful.

## 3. Major Points of Brightman's Exegesis - Verse by Verse[65]

**Rev 3:14** "And unto the Angel of the Church of the Laodiceans write, These things saith Amen, that faithfull and true witnesse, that beginning of the creatures of

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[64]Christianson, p. 246, also pp. 100-102; and Bauckham, Tudor Apocalypse, p. 223.

God."[66] Brightman's historicist reading enables him to show that the angel of each church refers to its group of Pastors. However, they are given the message so they can communicate it to the whole church.[67] Brightman uses the verse to remind his readers how fortunate and blessed their nation has been for the last forty two years under God and Queen Elizabeth.

**Rev 3:15** "I know thy workes, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot."[68] Brightman identifies specific reasons for England's lukewarmness. It is not cold because it espouses salvation by faith and the renouncing of Rome as Anti-christ. However, it is not hot because:

> . . . the outward Regiment is as yet for the greatest part Antichristian and Romish . . . tempering of pure doctrine and Romish Regiment maketh this lukewarmnesse, whereby we stand . . . between Romish and Reformed churches of both which we make a medly.[69]

Brightman points out that England has had the opportunity to be 'hot' and refers to the work Martin Bucer did to assist the early English Reformation. But because Bucer's reforms were not properly implemented by church or state, England was left in a state of lukewarm semi-reform. Scotland and Geneva are given as examples of ζεστός churches, while Rome, some Lutheran churches and Islam are ψυχρός communities.

**Rev 3:16** "Therefore, because thou art lukewarme and neither cold nor hot, it will come to passe, that I shall spew thee out of my mouth."[70] Lukewarmness is even worse than Popery. But Brightman counters the apparent weakness in the text's logic by

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[65]These biblical texts are quoted as they appear in Brightman's material on Revelation 3.
[66]Brightman exegesis of this text covers pp. 123-129.
[67]Ibid., p. 37.
[68]Brightman's exegesis of this text covers pp. 129-131.

saying that a return to Rome (i.e. coldness) would not in fact be an improvement because it would be a denial of what is known to be true. Brightman's 'elect-nation' theology emerges here in his exegesis. He reasons that Christ threatens and chastens Laodicea/England because he loves her and has great plans for her. She still has the option to respond, unlike the 'cold' Catholics who are neglected by God.

The phrase in this verse of the text that really animates Brightman is "spew you out of my mouth." The horror of this punishment lies in the loss of dignity and place with no chance of a return to "former dignity" because Christ would not want to return to his vomit. Various illustrations about vomiting are provided by way of comparison. Brightman now becomes selective in his application, trying to shift his rhetorical position from that of implied reader to implied author:

> Now this punishment was not to be common to the whole church of Laodicea, but proper to the Angel alone, that is, to all lukewarme Pastours . . . a punishment peculiar to the Ecclesiastical men, without the destruction of the whole church.[71]

Brightman thinks that the original pastor of the Laodicean church had been ejected from his position by John at Christ's instigation. The same thing will happen to the English clergy, unless they heed the warning addressed to them and speedily repent. He predicts that the "faithful witnesse shall overthrow this whole Hierarchy," and warns that "a great and shamefull judgement doth waite for these *luke warme men*."[72] This 'prediction' of the downfall of the episcopate was highlighted by those who championed

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[69]Ibid., p. 131.
[70]Brightman deals with v. 16 on pp. 132-135.
[71]Ibid., p. 134.
[72]Ibid. (His italics.)

Brightman as a prophet when the ecclesiastic hierarchy lost much of its influence and position in the 1640s (see below p. 246.)

Brightman feels that it is still possible to avoid being spewed out of Christ's mouth. However, this would be achievable only if the implementation of reforms, which had been done so half-heartedly by the English, were thoroughly embraced by them. These sins of omission had to be repented of. The church *would* survive, though it would suffer because it was infected with clerical sin. Repentance by the clerical hierarchy was the key that would unlock the trap of lukewarmness the church had fallen into.[73] Brightman believed that even ignorant people saw these things.

**Rev 3:17** "For thou saiest, I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing, and knowest not how thou art wretched, and miserable, and poore, and blinde and, naked."[74] Brightman applies the Laodiceans' claim "I am rich" to ecclesiastical wealth in general and the purchasing of stipends, in particular. The bishops and other high clergy have acquired more honour and wealth than even the aristocracy. The Church of England mocks the other reformed Churches by boasting: "In other places the Pastours of the Churches are poore and low degree and to be ranked well nigh the vulgar and base kinde of people."[75] However, it is the mistaken belief that the Church's wealth is a sign of God's blessing that has prevented the implementation of full reform.

The next Laodicean boast "I have no needs" is applied to a Parliamentary debate on ecclesiastical government in which the bishops sacrilegiously asked, "Why should we be tied to the ways of the early church?"[76] Brightman believed the early church's

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[73]Ibid., p. 135.
[74]Brightman deals with v. 17 on pp. 135-150.
[75]Ibid., pp. 136-137.
[76]Ibid., p. 137.

structure had apostolic authority and should be returned to. He also states that because this situation has been going on for more than forty years few dare criticise it. He has only accepted this risky task because he is compelled to do so by the text itself.

In Christ's appraisal of Laodicea 'wretchedness' is the hierarchy's lust for more wealth. They are 'poor' because of jealousy amongst the clergy. Begging for positions makes them look like paupers while honest parish priests remain literally poor. 'Blindness' is lack of wisdom and education. Brightman quotes specific actions of the General Synod of 1597 that he considers unwise and unbiblical. Many priests and bishops are uneducated "latinless asses." Brightman proposes that all clergymen should have an MA and be proven preachers, believing that if this rule were followed more ordinary people would be interested in religion. Finally it is the clergy who are 'naked,' being so ill equipped to pastor their flocks, for earthly riches make poor spiritual clothes.

**Rev 3:18** "I counsell thee to buy of me gold tryed by the fire, that thou maiest be made rich: and white rayment, that thou maiest be clothed, and that thy filthy nakednesse doe not appeare, and anoynt thine eyes with eye-salve that thou maist see."[77] With evident relief Brightman begins his exegesis, "Thus far of the cause; the remedy is next taught." Indeed throughout the vehement criticism he reminds the reader that England's wretched situation brings him no pleasure. It is his exegesis of the text that reveals the state that the nation is in.

Brightman pointedly compares the tarnished spiritual offerings of the Church of England with the glittering blessings, promised in the text, that might be available if only they return to the ways of the early church. Examples of the effects of "refined gold,"

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[77]Brightman deals with v. 18 on pp. 151-153.

"white garments" and "eyesalve" are to be found in the Scottish and Genevan church. ('Garments' gives him an opportunity to condemn ornate ecclesiastical vestments.)

**Rev 3:19** "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Be zealous therefore, and amend."[78] The rebuke is being fulfilled in that "many excellent men have laboured now these many yeeres together to this purpose, that their Brethren might understand the truth." The moral condition of England shows that this has been largely ineffective. Hence the chastening must come very soon. The worst of this chastening can still be avoided, and much will be gained from it, if England becomes zealous without delay.

> Purge out all thy Romish leven; hang not any longer in the midst betwene the reformed Churches and that that is Anti-christian: Cast away thy honours and riches for his sake who became most contemptible and poore for thee: . . . Let Innovators and corruptors of Doctrine be restrained: Let the Pastours have the power restored unto them, of exercising the Censures upon their own flocks . . .[79]

This is Brightman's blueprint for a spiritually revived England. The chastening would remove the trappings of Popery from the elect nation and allow Christ's blessing to fall in full upon his remnant people. He continues to develop this blueprint in his exegesis of the actual call to repent in Rev 3:19:

> Repent thee of thy injuries which thou hast done to thy Brethren, in casting some of them into Prison, in turning others out of their Livings and Estates, in depriving many of them of the power to preach the Word; in reviling them all, and slandering them with the odius names of

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[78]Brightman deals with v. 19 on pp. 154-156.
[79]Ibid., p. 155.

*Anabaptist and Puritanes*. Thou knowest these men have nothing at all to doe with those Sectaries: They who doe reprehend thy superstitions, doe teach most purely and holily concerning the magistrate, as whom they honour and obey . . . It was a notorious slander wherewith thou hast bleared the eyes of the Princesse, and brought thy brethren into hatred with her. . . . Repent, and wash away with teares thy former wicked practices: Forget thy riches; which the more thou lovest, the more thou shalt smart for it. That thing is hardly forsaken, which a man relyeth on with his whole heart. Well, Christ is determined certainly to spue thee out of his mouth, unlesse thou wilt speedily repent.[80]

It is evident then that Brightman applies the call specifically to the church hierarchy. This enables him to specify the evils they have committed; imprisoning critics, labelling honest preachers as extremists, ignoring biblical counsel, rejecting the biblical pattern of church government, deceiving the Queen,[81] and the love of wealth. This exegesis of the call to repent enables Brightman to reiterate his most important points. He also uses the letter's central admonition to defend his own position which is an increasing threat to the establishment and dangerous for himself. The fact that he is unsupportive of sectarians but sees Rev 3:19 as a call for revival and not separation is a significant example of the influence that the text exerts. It will be addressed further below.

**Rev 3:20** "Behold, I stand at the dore and knock. If any man heare my voice, and opens the doore, I will come in unto him and will sup with him, and he with me."[82]

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[80]Ibid., p. 156. (His italics.)

[81]Brightman saw an important apocalyptic rôle for Elizabeth I. and believed that the seven vials of Revelation 16 began with her reign, Ibid., pp. 126 and *passim*. See also Bauckham's analysis in Tudor Apocalypse, p. 223.

[82]Brightman deals with v. 20 on pp. 156-160.

The final verses of the letter, which contain the great promises of communion and blessing are applicable to all, not just the 'angels.' Brightman concentrates mainly on the promises but is distracted briefly by the Laodicean door. An opened door will of course let Christ in. But by extending the metaphor Brightman is able to develop a threat element even in this most conciliatory of verses. A door can also be used to push the unrepentant out. Brightman accuses the hierarchy of not allowing the free *pastoral* use of excommunication. Without it Christ (via the local Pastor) has nothing with which to 'convince' people to heed the warnings of the text and repent.

Brightman makes much of Christ's desire to eat with Laodicea. "These words then do teach, that there is a double . . . blessing remaining still in the English Church; namely the preaching of the word and the administering of the Sacraments."[83] The prophesied presence of Christ is something promised only to Laodicea and reinforces the elect-nation.

The blessings promised to Laodicea compensate the godly for staying in England and helping her to realise her true spiritual potential. Brightman understands their disgust at the nation's lukewarmness, but significantly he says that anyone who does abandon the Church of England theologically:

> . . . is full of evill, yea of blasphemy, who do in such manner make a departure from this Church, as if Christ were quite banished from hence, and that there could be no hope of salvation to those that abide here. Let these men consider, that Christ is here feasting with his members.[84]

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[83]Brightman, p. 158.
[84]Ibid., p. 159. (Earlier references to Anabaptists etc. imply he means their sort of defection.)

Again Brightman displays a complex nationalism and paradoxical support for the Church of England. Laodicea is <u>still</u> God's instrument, but it needs sharpening via divine chastening. If people repent they may dissuade radicals from schism and thus save them from damnation. With this centrist position Brightman managed to draw attacks from both the Anglican hierarchy and separatists alike (see below p. 246).

**Rev 3:21-22** "To him that overcometh, I will grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I overcame, and sit with Father in his throne. Let him that hath an eare, heare what the Spirit saith unto the churches."[85] 'Overcoming' means abandoning episcopal church government and repenting from all other "demi-popery". The promised throne is the highest honour for those who are faithful and it should be their goal, as opposed to any earthly seat of power. Brightman interprets "him that hath an ear" to mean that the righteous will accept his historicist scheme for the churches even though it is so unflattering to England. He ends his exegesis of the Laodicean letter by appealing yet again for repentance and strongly identifying with the text:

> Wee have need of zeale, to the intent wee may attaine to a full reformation. Wee hang as yet by Geometry, as it were, between heaven and hell; the contagious steaming of the Romish foggie lake doth in a deadly manner annoy us: *Our silver is as yet defiled with drosse; Our Wine is mingled with water*: Christ will no longer indure such *midling Angels* as ours are.[86]

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[85]Brightman deals with vs. 21-22 on pp. 160-162.
[86]Brightman, p. 162. (His italics.)

Summary

Throughout this exegesis Brightman exhibits a belief that Rev 3:14-22 is a detailed prediction of his own time and country. He argues that John's letter was written for an English audience and the angel of the Laodicean church is the Anglican clergy. He repeatedly uses phrases like "the English Angel", "our lukewarmnesse," "the state of our Laodicean Church," "England is lukewarme," and "Christ is here feasting with his members." The primary evidence of prophetic fulfilment is the lukewarm "mingle-mangle of the Popish Government with pure doctrine . . . this *demy piety* this *almost Christianite* together with the injoying of their totall sums of money."[87]

But there is also a positive prophetic fulfilment to be enjoyed by England. Laodicea has been abundantly blessed and specially selected by God.[88] She can still repent and in doing so could rise to a state of unrivalled spiritual purity. For while each church is paired with one that matched its characteristics, i.e. Ephesus with Philadelphia, Smyrna with Sardis, and Pergamum with Thyatira, Laodicea/England has no parallel.[89] Firth emphases this feature of Brightman's exegetical work:

> Laodicea stood for the potential Church of England, which if she once fulfilled her destiny might parallel the first church of all, the Garden of Eden. This was the first reference to a special significance reserved for England based upon and delivered within the context of an interpretation of the Apocalypse.[90]

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[87]Ibid., p. 136. (His italics.)

[88]Ibid., pp. 126-128f. Brightman believes that God has even protected England from Jesuit plots.

[89]Ibid., p. 123.

[90]Firth, p. 167.

This element of hope and promise in Brightman's hermeneutical scheme, combined with the attack on hierarchical excess and parochial lukewarmness ensured its successful acceptance in sections of English society.

## 4. The Reception and Use of Brightman's Historicist Hermeneutic of Laodicea

### a. Evidence of Early Influence

The influence of Brightman's historicist hermeneutic of the churches was extensive. However, because Apocalypsis Apocalypseos was banned and remained unpublished, even abroad, until 1609 it took some time for that influence to surface publicly. Other Puritans were using similar Laodicean imagery by the second decade of the seventeenth century and it is difficult to say if the earliest of this material is derivative or parallel. The background to Brightman's work, which has been explored, above (pp. 224f), was obviously common to many preachers and academics. Although this could have given rise to the use of Laodicean imagery independent of Brightman it is more likely that it assisted in making his work acceptable, and eventually very popular. There was certainly no other systematic interpretation of Revelation 2-3, which applies Laodicea to England, published in this period.

The earliest writer to link Laodicea and England prophetically, without obvious debt to Brightman, is Sampson Price (1585-1630).[91] In his sermon/pamphlet "Londons Warning by Laodicea's Luke-warmness" he aims to warn London and England to repent and be zealous, via a historicist application of the churches, especially Laodicea. "The time is at hand when all things fore-told here, shall be fulfilled, this being a perfect Eccleiasticall story from St. John to the end of the world, of all material things in the

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[91] Sampson Price, Londons Warning by Laodicea's Luke-warmness (London: 1613).

Church."[92] Price believes the message of Christ to Laodicea to be a message to his England.

A number of things show that Price was probably inspired by Brightman: phrases like "seeme protestant" and "luke-warme professors"; a belief that England was protected from Jesuit plots;[93] and appeals to prominent men about lukewarmness. Price also recognises that England is not totally corrupt and that Christ has a special future for it. Price preached and published this some four years after Brightman's work was published in Europe. It is unlikely he was not aware of it, although on some exegetical points he deviates from Brightman's scheme.

Other preachers/writers who used Brightman's ideas included Thomas Draxe (d. 1618),[94] Thomas Thompson[95], and Patrick Forbes (1564-1635).[96] These sermons, pamphlets and books assisted in the acceptance of the Laodicean hermeneutic and increased the social/spiritual influence of Rev 3:14-22. Brightman's work helped create, and began to define theologically, a section of the English church that has been called 'radical Puritanism.'[97] It was Brightman who "accorded the radical Puritan stream its first classic systematic exposition."[98] For the rest of the seventeenth century all writers who prophetically applied Laodicea to England clearly show their debt to Brightman, even if they do not acknowledge it. An important *Wirkungsgeschichte* of Rev 3:14-22

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[92]Ibid., p. 3.

[93]Ibid., pp. 54-56.

[94]Thomas Draxe, Alarum to the Last Judgement (London: 1615).

[95]Thomas Thompson, AntiChrist Arraigned (London: 1618).

[96]Patrick Forbes, A Learned Commentarie upon the Revelation of St. John (London: 1614). Partially historicist approach to the Revelation 2-3.

[97]Christianson, p. 10, divides mid-seventeenth-century English Protestantism into Anglicans, who equated Rome with Babylon; Separatist, who saw the C of E as part of Babylon; and Radical Puritans, who saw it as Laodicea, i.e. right doctrine, wrong government. Although these terms are debatable, for the sake of convenience Christianson's terminology will be utilised.

[98]Ibid, p. 100.

developed, and produced a body of reader response material which reveals much about the dynamics of the text.

Alexander Leighton (1568-1649) is an example of the early development and application of the Laodicean hermeneutic among the radical Puritans. Although he predicted grave consequences for England if it did not adopt presbyterian church government he was fiercely patriotic and called for a literal war against the Antichrist in his aptly titled Speculum Belli Sacri. Inspired as he was by Brightman's idea that it was the Angels who needed to repent, he called upon the clergy to initiate reforms by addressing the crown and the nobility rather than the masses.

> Our Laodicean conceit shall be so far from sheltering us that thereby we provoke God, that he can beare no longer, but that he must needs spue us out of his mouth . . . Wherefore in the first place awake you Angels . . . awake the Kings Majesty, awake the Prince, the Parliament, the Councell, the Nobles . . .[99]

b. Richard Bernard and Other Critics

Richard Bernard (1568-1641) gives probably the earliest account of the reception and popularity in England of Brightman's work. Bernard himself developed an historicist interpretation of Revelation 2-3 in which the whole Reformed church was now in a Philadelphian state.[100] This failed to have much influence. The possible reasons for this, in comparison to Brightman's success, will be explored below, (see p. 255). The main value of Bernard to this study is his rather sour remarks about the popularity of Brightman's work on the churches. "I perceive that men rest not satisfied, but desire to

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[99]Alexander Leighton, Speculum Belli Sacri (No place given: 1624), pp. 192-193.

be informed in some particulars, and especially touching an opinion of Master Brightmans."[101]

Bernard admits that the Laodicean hermeneutic is not easily disproved. But he wishes to idealise England as Philadelphia and to counter Brightman. He is not opposed to all of Brightman's commentary, only the prophetic correlation with Laodicea and the attack on the episcopate. Understandably Bernard is aggrieved that many common people can actually quote from Brightman's Laodicean exegesis "for these particular applications his booke hath been more bought up then for the rest of his most praise-worthie labour."[102] A statement like this points to the remarkable influence that the Laodicean idea was having in England especially when we realise that at this time Apocalypsis Apocalypseos was still banned in England, presumably available only secretly from European publishers.

The Laodicean hermeneutic appealed to reforming clergy and laity alike. But it did not strike a chord with either "Anglicans" or "Separatists" at home and in Europe.

> Brightman's work caused something of a sensation when it was first disseminated in the second decade of the seventeenth century; the government was quite disturbed by it, and an outcry against it was to be heard in both realms (i.e. England and Scotland). What aroused the government, however, was not simply Brightman's critique of the godly

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[100]Richard Bernard. A Key of Knowledge for the Opening of the Secret Mysteries of St. Johns Mysticall Revelation (London: 1617).

[101]Ibid., p. 1.

[102]Ibid., pp. 11-12.

prince . . . but his unprecedented emphasis on the great and happy events which, according to Revelation, would take place in the latter days.[103]

Brightman even faced criticism from Jean de l'Ecluse, the émigré translator of Apocalypsis Apocalypseos, who writes with sarcasm "whereby as with a salve, he cureth all her soares."[104] By "her" he means the Church of England. L'Ecluse was connected to the Mayflower pilgrims, separatists who saw no virtue at all in the English church. He specifically criticises Brightman's idea that the English church was in a complex state of lukewarmness. L'Ecluse sees this as impossible, a church is either of God or of Satan.[105] He also objects that Brightman lists England among the holy reformed churches, claims that England is blessed, and holds that it has some sanctified pastors. However, what such critics failed to appreciate was that Brightman is directed by the text itself which does offer hope, forgiveness and triumph to Laodicea.

Most historians of the period have focused on Brightman's influence on the upsurge of millenarianism in the early seventeenth century.[106] Their work concentrates primarily on Brightman's exegesis of Revelation 20. However Firth recognises briefly that Brightman's warning against England's Laodicean lukewarmness also made a

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[103]A H Williamson, Scottish National Consciousness in the Age of James VI: the Apocalypse, the Union and the Shaping of Scotland's Public Culture (Edinburgh: Donald, 1979), p. 32. Williamson's main interest is Brightman's chiliasm, but material like Bernard's shows that the Laodicean exegesis was just as popular with ordinary readers.

[104]Jean de l'Ecluse, An Advertisment to Everie Godly Reader of Mr. Thomas Brightman his book, namely, A Revelation of the Apocalyps (No place given: 1612), p. 7.

[105]Ibid, pp. 9-10.

[106]E.g. S Brachlow, The Communion of the Saints: Radical Puritan and Separatist Ecclesiology, 1570-1625 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 84-94; T Hayes, Winstanley the Digger: a Literary Analysis of Radical Ideas in the English Revolution (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 12; C Hill, Antichrist in Seventheenth Century England (London: Verso, 1990), pp. 156-163; and Bauckham, Tudor Apocalypse, pp. 208-227.

contribution to millenarianism.[107] More recently the impact of this part of his theology has found some further recognition.[108]

c. The Puritan Gentry

Another area where Brightman's influence shaped English thinking was amongst the Puritan gentry. These included Sir John Osborne who established Brightman in the living at Haynes and supported his work financially,[109] and Sir Robert Harley (1579-1656) under whose patronage Thomas Pierson prepared Brightman's manuscript for publication.[110] Probably the best known supporter was Sir Simonds D'Ewes (1602-1650), scholar, prolific writer, sheriff of Suffolk and member of the long parliament.[111]

D'Ewes believed that Thomas Brightman had been a prophet.[112] In his cherished project "Great Britaines Strength and Weaknes"[113] D'Ewes uses Brightman as an authority in his opening argument which establishes England's special rôle in the fight against Antichrist. He also uses him as an authority in his warning that England is self-satisfied and could lose her special place in God's favour if she fails to repent.[114] This indicates that D'Ewes had absorbed and accepted Brightman's Laodicean hermeneutic.

What appealed to the Puritan gentry about Brightman's vision was that the 'elect nation' was achievable via a shake up in the church rather than the social structure.[115] Unlike Anabaptist and Separatist material it did not threaten the social order, but it did

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[107]Firth, p. 204.

[108]A Zakai, "Thomas Brightman and the English Apocalyptic Tradition", in Y Kaplan et al (eds.) Menasseh Ben Israel and his World, Brill's Studies in Intellectual History, 15 (Leiden: E J Brill, 1989), pp. 31-44. See also section on 'Peak Influence' below.

[109]Fuller, p. 49.

[110]Apocalypsis Apocalypseos was in Harley's library by 1637, Cliffe, p. 206.

[111]D'Ewes kept a journal on the activities of the Long Parliament which is a significant source on this period in English history.

[112]See Harleian MS 593, fl. 139, in the British Library. Cliffe, p. 210, dates this MS at 1629.

[113]Harleian MS 339.

[114]Ibid., fl. 97-98.

[115]Cliffe, p. 211.

highlight the excess of the church and promise a blessed future for the nation in which they, the gentry, had a considerable stake. Material like D'Ewes' shows that Brightman was widely read in England in the 1620s and 1630s. His ideas were considered important and his complex image of Britain as both Laodicea and an elect nation influenced a broad section of society. Hence Rev 3:14-22 was being read with special significance and a sense of heightened awareness in the first half of the seventeenth century in England.

d. Peak Influence - the 1640s

Brightman's influence, and hence the influence of Rev 3:14-22, reached its apex in the 1640s, the decade of the Civil War. Due to the ending of the Laudian censorship Apocalypsis Apocalypseos could now be printed in England.

> The number of times which his Commentary was reprinted and the fact that his Whole Works were reprinted in 1644, some 37 years after his death, testify to the interest and influence he exerted upon Puritan thinking.[116]

Early in the decade various tracts declared Brightman to be a prophet who had predicted events more than thirty years after his death in his exegesis of the Laodicean letter.[117] Although there are many prophetic references to England in Brightman's work these tracts concentrated almost exclusively on Laodicea. This was because the tract writers believed that the most vital truths that he unearthed were "discovered out of the Epistle of the Angell of Laodicea."[118] Christianson points out that, "Radical Puritans

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[116]Toon, pp. 31-32.

[117]E.g. Rapha Harford, Reverend Mr. Brightmans Judgements (London: c. 1641), Anonymous, A Revelation of Mr Brightmans Revelation (London: 1641) and Anonymous, Brightmans Predictions and Prophecies (London: 1641).

[118]John Halsted, Brightman Redivivus (London: c. 1646), p. ii.

accepted his works because of the identification of the Church of England with Laodicea even when they rejected (his) pursuit of the millennium."[119]

The prophetic 'fulfilments' which these tracts concentrated on were the expulsion of the bishops from the House of Lords, the abolition of the Star Chamber and the Thirty Years war.[120] The rhetorical style of these tracts, particularly the anonymous A Revelation of Mr Brightmans Revelation, indicates that they were produced for a mass audience. Nor were they only concerned with attacking the church, as they also followed Brightman in declaring England to be Christ's elect nation. With Brightman as their authority they proclaimed that the text of the Laodicean letter predicted that England could surpass even the apostolic church in power and purity.[121]

> Although Christ be angry with us by reason we are so far from a perfect reformation . . . yet he saith Christ has begun his kingdome (at the time he wrote) which was in the days of blessed Queene Elizabeth . . . the finishing whereof will be required of this generation; otherwise expect God hath a controversie with this Land; but Christ hath begun his Kingdome both in England and Ireland, to raigne evermore . . .[122]

In the volatile years leading up to the Civil War sermons were preached to the Long Parliament that used Brightman's Laodicean imagery and invoked his prophetic authority.[123] Brightman's vision, of the English as a potentially godly people who needed

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[119]Christianson, p. 106.

[120]Harford, p. 3, paraphrases Brightman (p. 134), "the whole lukewarme Hierarchy shall quite bee overthrone and never recover their dignity again." Fulfilment is found in attempts by the re-established Parliament (1640) to impeach or abolish the bishops. On Thirty Years War 'fulfilments' see Toon, p. 29.

[121]Firth, p. 168. On Laodicea's potential see Brightman, p. 123 etc.

[122]Harford, pp. 5-6.

[123]E.g. Thomas Wilson, Davids Zeal (London: 1641); Henry Wilkinson, A Sermon (on Rev iii 16) against Luke-warmnesse in Religion (London: 1641); Henry Wilkinson, Babylons Ruine,

only to repent and rid themselves of the episcopate, was an important element in the build up to war. In fact, "to a large extent, the entire course of the Puritan movement up to and during the Puritan Revolution was determined by Brightman's correlation between England and Laodicea."[124]

The Laodicean hermeneutic helped give rise to Puritan migration to the New World[125] and to the Long Parliament's "Root and Branch Petition" of December 1640 (supported by the likes of Simonds D'Ewes) which proposed a major overhaul of ecclesiastical government in England. Brightman's influence on the "Root and Branch" Puritans is thought to have been considerable.[126]

e. Scholarly Influence

Later in the seventeenth century a number of scholarly commentators endorsed Brightman's historicist interpretation of Revelation 2-3. Some of these acknowledged their debt to him whilst others simply included it in their work. The most significant of these scholars was Joseph Mede (1586-1638). Mede's commentary on Revelation, Clavis Apocalyptica, was a work of systematic genius that marked the apogee of the English apocalyptic tradition and historicist hermeneutical schemes of Revelation.[127] Mede summarises his understanding of Revelation 2-3 and the application of the Laodicean pericope thus:

> . . . these seven Churches, besides their literal respect, were intended (and it may be chiefly) to be patterns and types of the several ages of the

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Jerusalems Rising (London: 1644), and Stanley Gower, Things now-a-doing (London: 1644). On Brightman's influence on the preachers to the Long Parliament see J F Wilson, pp. 211-222.

[124]Zakai, p. 42

[125]Ibid., pp. 41-44.

[126]W Lamont, Godly Rule: Politics and Religion, 1603-1660 (London: Macmillan, 1969), pp. 94-95.

[127]Christianson, pp. 245-6, and Firth, pp, 242-246.

> Catholick Church from the beginning thereof unto the end of the world . . . therefore no question but we may in Laodicea, as in a lively example, clearly reade our own state and learn wisedom.[128]

Mede, like Brightman, was popularly declared to be a prophet.[129] It is also significant that like Brightman he propounded a moderately reformed, non-separatist, ecclesiology.[130]

Mede's pupil Henry More (1614-1687) also supported the historicist interpretation.[131] More went so far as to suggest that a correct understanding of the "Vision of the Seven Churches" would help the country prosper and may be used by the government to steer the state along a proper course.[132] For many decades the widely published beliefs of these eminent men (both university dons) helped maintain the idea that the Laodicean epistle was of vital and specific importance to English society.

## C. Analysis of Brightman's Laodicean Hermeneutic

### 1. Brightman's Context and Agenda

Both text and context contribute to Brightman's interpretation and application of the Laodicean letter. No doubt he held a dim view of the established church even before his days at Cambridge where he was a noted critic of episcopacy.[133] He was also aware of England's special prophetic rôle that emerges from his major exegetical motivators Foxe and Bale. However, the text of Rev 3:14-22 does shape his thinking, restricting

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[128]Joseph Mede, The Works of the Pious and Profoundly-learned Joseph Mede BD, Fourth Edition (London: 1677), p. 295.

[129]Firth, p. 245.

[130]Christianson, p. 204.

[131]Henry More, An Exposition of the Seven Epistles to the Seven Churches (London: 1669).

[132]Ibid., p. 11.

certain interpretive directions and opening up others. This section will evaluate Brightman's agenda, the textual rhetoric of Rev 3:14-22 in his work and the application of the call to repentance. But the aspects of Brightman's context which helped shape his interpretation will also be borne in mind.

From Bale and Foxe Brightman took the view that Revelation provided a linear, periodized chronology of church history.[134] So when it comes to Rev 3:14-22 Brightman has little desire to comprehend it in the light of the other letters or to derive any systematic message from Revelation 2-3 as a whole. Christianson claims that "Brightman found apocalyptic verification in the opening chapters of the Apocalypse for establishing the pattern of Geneva upon all Christians."[135] But this is not strictly correct. Because Brightman accepts a historicist view of the churches there is no going back to Philadelphia (Geneva). Historicist biblical prophecy is uni-directional not cyclical. He is living in Laodicea and that will not change until the coming of Christ. But the text itself introduces the possibilities of improvement beyond even the Genevan model.

Although some have seen "elect nationism" in Bale and Foxe it is generally accepted that they were internationalists. Firth stresses that it was Brightman who "left the European context with the Reformation and found each succeeding prophecy fulfilled on his home soil."[136] However, this was not unique to him, indeed finding England in apocalyptic prophecy was part of the pre-Brightman context. It has been shown (above p. 227) that Bale believed that the apocalyptic process was further advanced here than in the rest of Europe. So although a careful modern reading of Foxe

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[133]The Dictionary of National Biography states that in his college Brightman frequently clashed with George Meriton, a future Dean of York, on the matter of "church ceremonies".

[134]Foxe "took very seriously the idea that the pattern of church history is to be found in the Apocalypse," Bauckham, Tudor Apocalypse, p. 80. On periodization see Ibid., pp. 83-85.

[135]Christianson, p. 101.

and Bale reveals their internationalism, their work was inevitably interpreted and read as "elect nationist" by many in Brightman's generation. Hence, the success of Brightman's commentary was not due to any novel jingoism.

Brightman comes to the text foreseeing a delayed Second Advent. Early Tudor Protestants had believed they were fighting the last battle against the false church. The sense of an imminent parousia waxed and waned but peaked around 1588 with the Armada's defeat.[137] Because nothing happened a sense of disappointment and delay was inevitable.[138] After 1588 some sought biblical reasons for a delay in order to offset the slump in spirituality.[139] In the historicist application of Rev 3:14-22 Brightman found these reasons and also a scapegoat. Christ could not return until the last church of history had repented and this strengthened the connection between expectation and repentance. The Armada proved God had a rôle for England, but the delay caused a decline in zeal. The Laodicean hermeneutic explained the situation so well that it had to be prophetic. It demonstrated that the end was near, yet provided a theology of delay. God had done his part and now England must do hers, through wholesale repentance.

Brightman believed in universal decay, as predicted in Revelation's seals, bowls and trumpets. But his commentary also contains an optimistic view of the recent history and future of England which was "unparalleled in Tudor thought."[140] Firth recognises that these two things were not mutually exclusive in Brightman's thinking (or that of his followers).[141] But Firth does not give any analysis of this possible paradox. It is, I

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[136]Firth, p. 236.
[137]Firth. p. 152.
[138]On the so-called "wonderful year" of 1588 and the 'Delay'. see Bauckham. Tudor Apocalypse. pp. 163-176.
[139]Ibid., p. 171.
[140]Bauckham. Tudor Apocalypse. p. 224.
[141]Firth. p. 168.

contend, best explained by Brightman's understanding of the Laodicean letter and its influence on him. The text leads the reader to the place where decay can be halted by repentance. Optimism about the future is then encouraged in those who rid themselves of lukewarmness and accept the promises of Rev 3:20-21.

The lack of allegorising in Brightman's exegesis shows that he thinks that the text is addressed almost exclusively to his own situation. His scheme allows him to demand specific reforms again and again, as will be shown below. Contemporary non-historicist interpretations of the letters, such as the work of George Gifford (d. 1600) and William Perkins (1558-1602),[142] do not contain nearly so much specific application. Indeed their work has a far higher degree of allegorisation and far less anglo-specific application to the situation of the day than does Brightman's.

The works of Gifford and Perkins provide a 'control' with which to assess Brightman. The application of the Philadelphian pericope (Rev 3:7-13) to England by Richard Bernard provides another. Bernard developed an historicist interpretation of Revelation 2-3 in which the Reformed Church is in "the beautifull and lovely Philadelphian state of the church . . . (in this estate are we in these days)" which began with Elizabeth's reign.[143] Bernard's work is full of praise for the monarchy, government and church as it must be in order to remain anywhere near the text of Rev 3:7-13. Problems will only come in the future if Protestantism slips into a Laodicean state.[144]

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[142]George Gifford, Sermons upon the whole Book of Revelation (London: 1599), pp. 101-111; William Perkins, A Godly and Learned Exposition or Commentarie upon the three first chapters of Revelation (London: 1607), pp. 191-212.

[143]Richard Bernard, The Seaven Golden Candlestickes (London: 1621), Philadelphian section, p. 6. (No pagination in the original.)

[144]Ibid., Laodicean section, p. 3-4.

Bernard had an early following amongst the Puritan gentry,[145] but this left little trace by mid-century, unlike Brightman's work. The Philadelphian pericope does deliver a more pleasing message than the Laodicean; however, a Philadelphian has everything to lose but a Laodicean has everything to gain. Day to day life in the parish has little in common with the Philadelphian community described in Rev 3:7-13. Bernard's work, and any other that followed a similar interpretive scheme (and remained true to the text), was sycophantic to those in leadership and flattering to all it included in its remit. Identifying with Philadelphia is of little use to the grass roots exegete who is trying to maintain discipline and righteousness in his community. The rhetorical dynamics of the Laodicean letter are stronger and more useful to preacher, pastor and civic leader alike.

## 2. Brightman's Utilisation of the Rhetoric Dynamics of the Laodicean Letter

### a. Narrative Identity

At the beginning of his material on the letters Brightman identifies himself with the angels of Revelation 2-3, especially the Laodicean angel.[146] The angels are those who have received the message and have a responsibility to communicate it. So in reader criticism terms he identifies himself with the 'Narratee'[147] at this point and takes his share of the responsibility to transmit the message "to the whole congregation," that is, the English nation, for whom it is intended.

Brightman's claim that 'discovering' that England is Laodicea has caused him personal pain needs to be taken seriously. By all accounts he was a gracious man and an earnest, honest scholar,[148] and he was condemned for his loyalty to the Church of

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[145]Cliffe, p. 221.
[146]The angel of the church always represents a collective body. Brightman. p. 37.
[147]See above p. 191 for a definition of this reader criticism terminology.
[148]Fuller, p. 50.

England by the Separatists. His elaborate apology[149] to his readers about his distressing discovery gives the impression of a man being led by the text in a direction that he would rather not go, rather than of someone forcing an exegesis on the text.

Brightman also identifies himself completely with corporate Laodicea; as he shows through phrases like "Christ himself loathing *us*" and "extreme anger against *us*." In fact he never divorces himself from the church, it is "*our* one Church of England"[150] throughout. Any desires he might have to split the church into congregation and 'angel' are quashed by the rhetoric of the text. Unlike some of the other churches in Revelation 2-3 there is no separate group in Laodicea which has been righteous or a group that has been specifically wicked like the Nicolaitans in Pergamum (Rev 2:15). The letter is addressed to the angel but is rhetorically meant for the entire Laodicean congregation, laity and clergy alike.

At the point of the threatened punishment, "spew you out of my mouth" (Rev 3:16), Brightman switches his own reader-response identification from the narratee to the implied author, the prophet John. But the text still constrains him from splitting the church. Thus although the punishment may only be intended for the angels, the whole church will suffer.[151] Throughout this section Brightman continues to identify with "our church of England."

b. <u>The Repentance Call</u>

Brightman strongly associates himself with the Laodicean call to repentance. This appeal is among the most positive in Revelation. There is still the hope of repentance occurring unlike in the call to Jezebel in Rev 2:21, or for the third of

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[149]Brightman, pp. 123-124.
[150]Ibid., pp. 124-125. (My italics).

humanity in Rev 9:20. To reinforce this hope the rewards for repenting are detailed immediately after the call. This is not the case in the other letters with repentance calls (Ephesus, Sardis, Thyatira and Pergamum), where the call is followed immediately with a threat. Brightman applies England's lukewarmness primarily to the partial implementation of the Reformation and the retention of the episcopal system. England has room for improvement in all areas but it is never totally wicked.

The command to be zealous and repent is not interpreted as just a spiritual entreaty. As we saw above (p. 239) in Brightman's commentary on Rev 3:19 the things to repent of are contemporary, specific, and of particular relevance to Brightman himself. Primarily this relates to the persecution of men with anti-episcopal views (like his) who are unfairly imprisoned and falsely labelled as separatists, and of course his major theme; "purge out all thy Romish leven; hang not any longer in the midst between the reformed Churches and that that is Anti-christian."[152]

The label 'lukewarm' enables the interpreter to classify anything that an apologist might claim as righteousness, as mere sham. "Be zealous and repent" applies to everyone and everything. However, "Brightman never pressed his complaint to the point of separatism, which he denounced as evil and blasphemous, and he stressed that the Elizabethan system was a true church despite its shortcomings."[153] So his Laodicean hermeneutic defends against those who wish to write the church off altogether. In the hands of a prophetically compelled exegete the repentance call generates a reader-response of maximum gratitude but also maximum guilt because of past ingratitude.

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[151]Ibid., pp. 134-135.
[152]Ibid., p 155.
[153]Capp, p. 101.

c. Laodicean Claims - Disputation Speech

Laodicea's lack of praiseworthy virtue sets it apart from most other churches. There are no achievements, either personal or corporate, which the church may boast of. However, Laodicea still claims "I am rich," "I have acquired wealth" and "I have need of nothing." But these imaginary claims are systematically debunked by the criticism, "you are the wretchedest; pitiful, poor, blind and naked." This 'disputation speech'[154] of Rev 3:17 is applied by Brightman to the specific sins of Anglicanism. His main target, facilitated by the text, is the false power of money. Brightman's ideal for England is European Calvinist Protestantism where monetary wealth is not available to the clergy. This will keep them more in touch with people's needs and more able to feed them spiritually.

'Disputation Speech' centres around the common human attribute of conceit. It enables the prophet/exegete to use the church's own proud boasts and declarations to condemn it. Brightman utilises the rhetorical power of this device, in the same way the Hebrew prophets did. As an example of the church's blindness he asks his readers to:

> Call to minde therefore with me the last Constitution and Canons, which are wont to be wisest, discussed in a Synod at London and set forth Anno 1597. And I pray thee what a kinde of Medicine thou makest for a sick Church?[155]

So in Brightman's estimation the declarations of the Synod are self-confessed spiritual ineptitude. He uses the episcopate's own words to expose their spiritual nakedness.

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[154]A rhetorical devise originating with the Old Testament prophets, see above, pp. 194-211.
[155]Brightman, p. 145.

d. Constructive Threats and Chastening - The Stick

From the divine declaration that Laodicea is blind, Brightman develops an attack on unwise ecclesiastical government and the uneducated state of the clergy. However poverty, blindness and nakedness combine in the text to describe the lowest and most desperate of human states. Such a blind beggar is vulnerable, and exploitation and exposure of that vulnerability for ungodly motives is repellent to Brightman. Hence the highly popular Marprelate document,[156] which sarcastically slates the Church of England and calls for an enforcement of presbyterianism is not appreciated by Brightman.[157] The Marprelate material is cynical and crude in its exploitation of public opinion and is critical of everyone. Its methods were therefore alien to Brightman because in his scheme Laodicea can still repent and achieve what Christ wishes for it. Thus only well intentioned, constructive criticism is appropriate. This is reflected in the attitude toward the establishment reflected in the pro-Brightman documents of the 1640s, (above, p. 249). Laodicea can not be escaped from but it can be purified from within.

Brightman makes much of Rev 3:19, and the inevitability, even desirability, of divine chastening. This prophesied chastening has already begun in that "many excellent men have laboured now these many yeeres together to this purpose, that their Brethren might understand the truth."[158] By implication this also includes his own current work. Brightman is fulfilling the prophecy as he writes.

The punishment/threat has aspects of violence, repulsion and intimacy. It gives the historicist preacher or writer maximum opportunity to use it as a motivational threat

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[156]This circulated in various forms, having originated around 1588. On its impact and approach see D McGinn, John Penry and the Marprelate Controversy (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1966), especially pp. 89-100, also Christianson, pp. 66-70.

[157]Brightman, pp. 149-150.

[158]Ibid., p. 155.

to draw out the desired repentance because Christ is on the very brink of doing it. The suddenness, violence and unpredictability of the process of vomiting adds a certain unpleasant, but highly effective, tension to the text. Laodicea's situation is precarious in the extreme.

The text's rhetorical construction makes it natural for the 'zealousness' called for in Rev 3:19 to be linked with the criticism of verses 17 and 18. Brightman therefore defines the correct zealous response as, "Cast away thy honours and riches for his sake who became most contemptible and poore for thee."[159] Because he is a part of the prophesied chastisement and reproof he himself must contribute to the positive constructivism of the text, and not merely attack the church. Brightman gives many helpful directions as to how a 'hot' Laodicea might be arrived at. The suggestions he gives are both general, e.g. abandonment of episcopal government, and specific, as here:

> Let faithful Pastors be set over every Congregation: Let them that are set up and called to places of charge over soules, be compelled to be diligent: Let Innovators . . . be restrained: Let the Pastors have the power restored unto them, of exercising the censures upon their owne flocks; And do not dispute with Christ how profitably a Church-policie, that is in use among the enemies of the Gospell, may be joyned with the Gospell.[160]

e. <u>The Power of the Promises - The Carrot</u>

The interplay between text and reader in Brightman's interpretation of the Laodicean promises (Rev 3:20-21) again reveals the multifaceted motivational force of

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[159]Ibid.
[160]Ibid.

this passage. The power and flexibility of the text are the keys to its usefulness as a reformatory passage. No blessings are spelled out by the text but by implication the church has enjoyed the intimacy of Christ's 'mouth,' and it still does - just. Brightman utilises this aspect of the text by reminding his readers of the blessings and protection that God has heaped on their ungrateful heads.[161]

For Brightman the promise that Christ will feast with his people is already being partially fulfilled. Separatists and those who give up trying to restore the church are:

> . . . full of evill, yea of blasphemy, who do in such manner make a departure from this Church, as if Christ were quite banished from hence, and that there could be no hope of salvation to those that abide here. Let these men consider, that Christ is here feasting with his members.[162]

Christ still stands by Laodicea driving her, via reproof and discipline, to a position where he can enter and eat (Rev 3:20). Thus English reformers should attempt to effect corporate repentance and not seek separation. God has chosen England for great things, greater even than the other reformed churches, and this is evident in the scriptural portrait of England which Brightman goes on to develop in the rest of the commentary. England is truly God's instrument, and if sharpened, all the promises of the Laodicean pericope will be realised.

f. Summary

Brightman's approach, aided by the rhetoric of the text, is both pragmatic and mature. Separation is not the answer for a lukewarm church, because an historicist hermeneutic dictates that "If you flee from this Christ that suppeth with the Elect in our

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[161]Ibid., pp. 126-129.
[162]Ibid., p. 159. (My emphasis.)

Congregations . . . certainly you shall find him no where." "Neither must we hold our selves contented with these corruptions, (i.e. the popery in the Church of England) neither must they (i.e. Anabaptists etc.) separate themselves from us for any blemishes."[163] The Laodicean letter is an excellent tool to motivate ordinary people in the direction of heaven by the right balance of hope and threat.

The text's power to motivate and castigate by both positive and negative allusions is its most powerful rhetorical dynamic. Hence it is the ideal vehicle for an exegete like Brightman who wishes both to motivate and castigate from a position within the body he is attempting to reform. An historicist application of Philadelphia could not achieve this. Equally the Laodicean model is of no value to Separatists who wish to start again from scratch. In fact its ambiguity is positively offensive to them, for it is "unpossible (*sic*) to be both a holy member of Christ, and worse than a Papist."[164]

Hence from the position of the implied writer the preacher/interpreter delivers a message that gives the audience the power to regenerate. Adopting an historicist interpretation and applying Laodicea to one's own circumstances can produce the "reformation from within" dynamic that Brightman demonstrates. This function of the text remains in harmony with John's original intent. The 'glorious future' post-millennialism that Brightman is best known for was strongly augmented in the minds of ordinary people by the elect-nationism and promises of the Laodicean hermeneutic.[165]

Whilst the shortcomings of the church were severe the rhetoric of the Laodicean letter, particularly Rev 3:19, ("Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline, so be earnest and repent"), meant England was on a knife edge between damnation and the glory of

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[163]Ibid., pp. 159-160. (my parentheses.)
[164]L'Ecluse, p. 11.

the millennium. Brightman's suggested reforms were motivated by a desire to proclaim the call to repentance of Rev 3:19 and thereby tip the balance toward the millennium.

> Brightman saw his own age, the age of reformation, as a consummation and as a time for the completion of human knowledge. When the reformation was complete and the lukewarmness of Laodicea overcome, then would begin the Golden Age, the millennium of the saints.[166]

## 3. Analysis of Laodicean *Wirkungsgeschichte* in Seventeenth-Century England

This section will look at the actual influence that the Laodicean hermeneutic had upon the section of mid-seventeenth-century English society that accepted it.

Thanks to the popularising of Brightman's views by those who thought him to be a prophet, by the 1640s the idea that England was an elect nation, chosen by God and prophetically described in Rev 3:14-22, was widespread. Indeed there was Scottish resentment that ". . . completely and utterly Englishmen linked the Revelation with their history - and with their history alone." England arrogantly saw itself as a chosen nation thanks in part to the work of Foxe and Brightman who "had tried to turn the Revelation into a history - indeed an English history."[167] The importance of the rôle played by Brightman's historicist theology, post-millennialism and vision of England more than thirty years after his death is recognised by most historians of the period. He was among those select Elizabethan interpreters who provided the "potent legacy bequeathed by a few advanced thinkers in the later years of Elizabeth to the apocalyptic writers of the early Stuart period."[168]

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[165]See Capp, p. 100; Zakai, pp. 36-38 and 43.
[166]Firth, p. 251.
[167]Williamson, p. 33.
[168]Bauckham, Tudor Apocalypse, p. 212.

The optimistic radicalism of the day and the desire to be rid of corruption in church and state (as personified by bishop and king) was reflected in many interpretations of Rev 3:14-22. The Laodicean hermeneutic helped generate, or at least augment, the *Zeitgeist* of the 1640s. Sermons preached before parliament (and published on its orders) called for the people and their rulers to repent and be zealous. Preachers like Wilkinson and Salwey[169] started from the premise that England was an elect nation but needed to repent and reform in accordance with Rev 3:14-22. "You are the first fruits of a Kingdome, chosen on purpose for special service . . . A nation is represented by you (e.g. the Members of Parliament) and truely a very miserable nation because a very sinful one."[170] A utilisation of the historicist application of Laodicea to England evidently assisted these preachers as they urged and castigated their audience to produce zeal and repentance.

The popular tracts of the 1640s, which brought Brightman's ideas about Laodicea to the masses, encouraged social and theological optimism. Because England was Laodicea, "there will succeed in the room thereof (i.e. England) happy days with abundance of peace and all good things."[171] If these tracts reflect popular feeling to any extent at all it should be concluded that many English people were motivated and constrained by the parameters of the Laodicean pericope and would have read it as having a personal claim on them. In a populist format and language the tracts told their readers that Brightman "speakes of our times just as they are now."[172]

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[169]Wilkinson, A Sermon (on Rev iii 16) against Lukewarmenesse in Religion; Babylons Ruine, Jerusalems Rising; and Arthur Salwey, Halting Stigmatiz'd in a Sermon (London: 1643).

[170]Wilkinson, Babylons Ruine, p. 31. (My parentheses.)

[171]Harford, as quoted in Firth, p. 230.

[172]A Revelation of Mr. Brightmans Revelation, p. 34.

One pamphleteer, Rapha Harford, saw the decline of the bishops in the 1640s as proof that he was living in Laodicea and the time of the prophetic fulfilment of Rev 3:14-22. His pro-Brightman pamphlet is confidently dated "Printed in the yeare of fulfilling it, 1641"[173]. He also saw England's need for continued repentance if it was to inherit the glorious future. And he found a hope-based motivation in the text because "although Christ be angry with us, by reason we are so far from a perfect reformation . . . but Christ hath begun his Kingdome both in England and Ireland, to raigne evermore."[174] John Archer extended Brightman's millenarianism into a full blown earthly kingdom of Christ. The letters of Revelation 2-3 were part of the model for this and "the rewards promised in the Epistle to the seaven Churches in Asia, are meant of these times of Christs Kingdome . . . and not of rewards in Heaven . . . all these things are applyed to Christs kingdom on earth."[175]

Within radical Puritanism political events were interpreted in terms of the threats, chastisements and promises of glory given to Laodicea. Historicist interpretations reflected "the English Protestant conception of the decline of the church and its anticipated delivery in Stuart England."[176] Those interpreters who followed Brightman on Laodicea helped heighten this sense of crisis and imminent delivery. Catholic success in continental wars, the Laudian persecution and moral decline were seen by Puritans like Sir Simonds D'Ewes as accurate testimony of the validity of Brightman's prophecies.[177]

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[173]Harford, title page.
[174]Ibid., pp. 5-6.
[175]John Archer, The Personall Reign of Christ on Earth (No place given: 1642), p. 19.
[176]J F Wilson, pp. 219-220.
[177]Cliffe, p. 210-211.

Writers like D'Ewes (above p. 248f) tended not to refer to specific passages of Brightman's exegesis but the tracts of the 1640s concentrate almost exclusively on his interpretation of the three contemporary churches, Laodicea in particular. The specific incident that seems to have sparked the publication of the tracts is the episcopal decline of 1641 which is felt to be a fulfilment of Brightman's prophecy. But there is a notable lack of triumphalism. Because the fate of the 'angel' is not detachable from the Laodicean community of the text, and because that community is England, the ultimate conclusion and message of the tracts is meant for the common man, not the bishops.

The anonymous tract A Revelation of Mr Brightmans Revelation employs the rhetorical device of a discussion on a journey between an unlearned but earnest 'Citizen' and a 'Minister of the Gospell' who is well versed in Brightman's hermeneutic. Citizen speaks for the common man and ultimately concludes, "the Lord give us all grace to repent, and come out of Babylon."[178] Those who wrote these tracts felt that Christ (through St John and the prophet Brightman) was addressing them and their condition through the text of Rev 3:14-22. They wished their audience to repent of lukewarmness in order to assist in the accomplishment of Christ entering in and eating with his chosen people for the end time, i.e. a repentant and zealous England/Laodicea.

An unusual but no doubt very popular example of the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of Rev 3:14-22 in the 1640s is the poem Five Strange and Wonderful Prophesies. The five prophets referred to are Ignatius Loyola, Scottish Merlin, Otwell Bins, Mother Shipton and Thomas Brightman. Marginal notes at the beginning of the section on Brightman explain to the reader that "Master Brightman makes Laodicea the counterpaine of

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[178] A Revelation of Mr Brightmans Revelation, p. 37.

Englans (*sic*), terming it Lukewarme."[179] As well as covering Brightman's predictions about the fall of the bishops it makes a perceptive and stoical application of the Laodicean message but still culminates in a prediction of reform.

> But Englands Church must feele the thorne, Untill she thoroughly herself reforme;
> Such hurly burly and such stir, No forme of Church shall remain in her:
> But reformation must take breath, From the raigne of Queene Elizabeth.[180]

This response to the Laodicean call to repent evidently understands the purpose of the text's chastisement and anticipates a glorious future. This type of publication demonstrates that the text had an influence at a very popular level.

Those who followed Brightman, the so called 'Radical Puritans,'[181] placed restrictions on both their optimism and criticism of the state and church. Wealthy Puritans were keen for paradise on earth via a morally reformed state but most likely viewed the New Jerusalem in terms of nothing more than a purified and reformed Church of England. They did not wish for the social upheaval of Winstanley the Digger or the separatism of the Pilgrim Fathers.[182] But the dynamic between text and audience in this issue was still a strong one. Reform from within rather than an iconoclastic revolution was the preferred solution. Indeed "it is the debt of English Puritanism to Brightman in 1641 that explains both its fervour and its seeming imprecision."[183] It is the

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[179]Anonymous, Five Strange and Wonderful Prophesies (London:1642), p. 4.
[180]Ibid., p. 5.
[181]According to Christianson's definition, p. 35.
[182]Cliffe, pp. 211-212, and 232.
[183]Lamont, p. 95.

'moderating' influence of the Laodicean pericope that accounts for this in Brightman and those he influenced.

When Brightman's work was used as a call for revolution it was not done with reference to Revelation 2-3.[184] In his hermeneutical scheme he is highly critical and does call for some extremely stringent reforms. But as long as his readers and those following his historicist interpretation of the letters believed their nation to be specifically addressed by the Laodicean letter they were restricted from separation. The text compelled them to recognise themselves as the chief of those in need of repentance.

It would appear therefore that because Brightman and others identified England with Laodicea and applied the letter to the English people, Rev 3:14-22 influenced the radical branch of Puritanism, as well as later radical movements such as the Fifth Monarchy Men and even, it might be argued, larger sections of English society.

> Brightman's image of Laodicea, standing apart both from the separatist identification of the Church of England with antichrist and from the 'root and branch' branding of the bishops as a part of Babylon, perfectly exemplifies the apocalyptic position of most radical Puritans. Although negative in warning, the image also held forth a potentially positive promise.[185]

Hence the effect of Rev 3:14-22 on seventeenth-century English society involved both a 'stick' to castigate the established church with and a 'carrot' to develop nationalist feelings and repentance.

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[184]J F Wilson, pp. 219-221.
[185]Christianson, p. 102.

## D. Conclusion

The reading of the Laodicean pericope by Brightman and his 'school' is uniquely interesting from a reader-response and literary critical perspective. They read it as if they were the text's primary audience and as if the text had reserved its most potent message for them. Such an attitude toward a text empowers it to have considerable influence over its audience and reveals aspects of its motivational dynamics.

The perfection of Philadelphia and evil of Sardis depict unrealistic social extremes. Such extremes have limited exegetical value because the majority of people are aware that society, including themselves, is mostly just lukewarm. The more socially 'realistic' message to Laodicea has something to say to the average slack parishioner who apathetically goes through the motions of his or her religion.

The Laodicean letter gives the interpreter or preacher the dynamic literary devices that motivate repentance from all manner of shortcomings, particularly arrogance and self-satisfaction. It can be effectively used to expose need and inadequacy, leaving the audience in a weaker position and the preacher in a position of strength and authority. However, the preacher of the message is, by profession, analogous to the narratee. Therefore he or she is not excluded from castigation and thus can not alienate himself or herself from his or her audience. The use of hope (future reward) rather than praise, as a positive motivator to repent is the rhetorical dynamic that drives the message forward. Thus the tendency for reflective self-praise, which is present in the Philadelphian letter, is avoided.

Although Brightman was recognised as a fine scholar and persuasive preacher, his work would have had little impact upon the history of interpretation, or have much relevance to the analysis of the literary dynamics of Rev 3:14-22, if his ideas about

England's place in prophecy had not had such influence upon political and religious life in England. It was not just one country cleric who believed he was living in Laodicea. A whole segment of society understood their age and their spiritual rôle in terms of the language and rhetoric of Rev 3:14-22. From it, and other Anglo-centric interpretations of apocalyptic passages, they understood that their nation had a unique function to fulfil. If it could shake off its lukewarmness, repent and be zealous it would become the predicted 'elect nation' and receive all the blessings promised in Rev 3:20-21.

The Brightman episode in the history of interpretation demonstrates the relevance and accuracy of Luz's statement that *Wirkungsgeschichte* can "call attention to the power of the texts to become alive *anew* in each new situation" and that it can "aid us in learning from successful and unsuccessful realisations of biblical texts." Indeed, "It poses the question of the consequences of biblical texts."[186]

The next chapter will examine a mid-nineteenth-century example of the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of Rev 3:14-22 as demonstrated in a sect with a hyper-dynamic relationship to Scripture: the early Seventh-day Adventist movement.

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[186]Luz., pp. 97-99.

# Chapter Five

## Seventh-day Adventism: Self Appointed Laodicea

### A. Origins and Background of the Seventh-day Adventist Church

An analysis, from primary sources, of the early history of Seventh-day Adventist[1] interpretation of the Laodicean letter, and its influence upon that community, will be the main concern in this chapter. The prime focus will be on the influence of the call to repentance in Rev 3:19. But first it will be helpful to give some background information on the Seventh-day Adventist church, paying particular attention to its eschatology, early doctrinal development, its self image and its attitude to Scripture and inspiration.

#### 1. The Millerite Movement

The Seventh-day Adventist church grew out of the apocalyptic "Millerite Movement" which flourished in New England in the first half of the nineteenth century. William Miller, (1782-1849)[2] a prolific preacher and keen amateur Bible student, aroused great public attention by setting a contemporary date for Christ's 'Second Coming'. Miller convinced tens of thousands of followers across America (and even in

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[1]To avoid confusion the terms Adventist and Adventism will be used to designate all who looked for an imminent advent in the nineteenth century. The specific Seventh-day Adventist denomination will be referred to as the Seventh-day Adventist Church or the SDA Church and members of it as Seventh-day Adventists or SDAs. However, note that it is common practice for Seventh-day Adventists to use the terms Adventist and Adventism when referring exclusively to themselves from the 1860s onwards.

[2]For a comprehensive work on Miller see E N Dick, William Miller and the Advent Crisis (Berrien Springs, Michigan: Andrews University Press, 1994).

Europe)[3] that the prophecies of Scripture proved that they were living at the end of time. The "2300 days" prophecy of Dan 8:14 pinpointed October 22nd 1844 as the precise time of Christ's return.[4]

Miller's movement was in turn a part of the "Second Great Awakening," a general spiritual revival in the Anglo-Saxon world.[5] Broadly speaking, and especially with regard to the interpretation of prophecy, this had its hermeneutical origins in seventeenth-century English Puritanism. The huge hermeneutic and doctrinal debt that the Millerites and, in their turn, the Seventh-day Adventist Church owed to sixteenth and seventeenth-century English Puritanism has been shown in detail by Bryan Ball[6] and acknowledged by many other writers. This heritage cannot be explored further here except for the very specific area of the historicist interpretation of the seven churches (see below p. 277).

## 2. After the Disappointment

Miller's movement was not completely destroyed on the morning of October 23rd 1844,[7] the day after he claimed that Christ would return and the world would end. Groups of his followers continued to hold to his principles of prophetic interpretation and sought to understand the eschatological time prophecies of Daniel and Revelation in

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[3]H I Dunton, "The Millerite Adventists and Other Millenarian Groups in Great Britain 1830-1860" (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Kings College London, 1984), especially pp. 102-169.

[4]On Miller's prophecies and the origins of the Advent movement see D T Arthur, "Millerism" in E S Gaustad (ed.), The Rise of Adventism (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), pp. 154-172, and D D Jordan, The Seventh-day Adventists: A History (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1988), pp. 25-37.

[5]On the Second Great Awakening's place within American religion of the early nineteenth century see N O Hatch, The Democratization of American Christianity (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), pp. 56f and 220-226. For its influence in Europe see Dunton, pp. 87-101.

[6]Ball, The English Connection. Ball demonstrates the Puritan origins of core SDA beliefs such as the seventh-day Sabbath, pp. 138-158, eschatology, pp. 178-228, believer's baptism, pp. 83-101, the heavenly sanctuary, pp. 102-119 and so on.

the light of their disappointing experience. One of these groups, led by the young prophetess Ellen Gould White (*née* Harmon) (1827-1915), and her husband James Springer White (1821-1881), but *sans* Miller, became the infant Seventh-day Adventist Church.

A number of the distinctive doctrinal, sociological and historical features of this religious 'movement' (a term SDAs still like to apply to their organisation) are significant to this study. Along with all nineteenth-century Adventists, Seventh-day Adventists accepted the historicist view of prophecy which had remained the standard hermeneutic among most Protestants since Puritan times. They applied the 'year for a day'[8] principle to time prophecies, as had Mede, Brightman, Bale and most other Puritan exegetes. Their view of Scripture bordered on verbal inspiration, but they concentrated heavily on apocalyptic passages in their early tracts and sermons. In them they sought a coherent way out of the 'great disappointment' that had befallen Miller as they went through a process of cognitive dissonance.[9] Early nineteenth-century Adventists viewed both Daniel and Revelation as a predicted history of the war between antichrist and the righteous. As they believed themselves to be at the very end of time the eschatological struggles described in this biblical material applied more to their generation than any previous one.

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[7]Oct 22, 1844 was the last of a number of dates set by Miller or his followers. This traumatic non-event was later to be referred to by Seventh-day Adventists and others as the 'Great Disappointment.' On this event and its effects on the SDA mindset see O'Leary, pp. 106f.

[8]This interpretive device goes back in Christian usage at least as far as Joachim of Fiore, and for two centuries after the Reformation most Protestant expositors accepted it without question, see Ball, The English Connection, p. 202. Using such texts as Num 14:34 and Ezk 4:6, exegetes of prophecy have believed such time periods as the 2300 evenings and mornings of Dan 8:14 and the 1260 days of Rev 11:3 to denote periods of 360 day 'years' rather than literal 24 hour days.

[9]For a discussion of this phenomenon see G R Knight, Millennial Fever (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press, 1993), pp. 267-294 and 304-306; M Bull and K Lockhart, Seeking a Sanctuary: Seventh-day Adventism and the American Dream (San Francisco: Harpers & Row, 1989), p. 6; O'Leary, pp. 108-109, and Dick, pp. 155-169.

After the disappointment early Seventh-day Adventists continued to expect the Second Coming but moved away from setting dates for it. They believed that Oct 22, 1844 had marked 'the beginning of the end' and was a point of transition in the heavenly sanctuary.[10] They remained pre-millennialists. Perhaps of most significance to this study, they believed themselves to be the 'Remnant Church.' This concept was crucial to SDA identity and was developed theologically from the concept of the church that they extracted from the prophecies of Revelation.[11] They believed that they were specifically called to declare the messages of the three angels of Rev 14:6-12 to the world at the end of time.[12] These three messages, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgement has come" and "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries" and "If anyone worship the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, he too will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath", are still the declared *raison d'être* of the Seventh-day Adventist church.[13]

### 3. Adventists and the Apocalypse

All of this meant that from its inception the SDA church has had a highly dynamic interaction with the book of Revelation. The influence that Revelation has had, and continues to have, upon individual Seventh-day Adventists and the denomination as a whole, is immense. It influences their soteriology, christology, ecclesiology and world-view, and it drives their evangelistic desire to reach the entire world with their message.

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[10]This complex doctrinal apologetic became known as the "Investigative Judgement" and is based on SDA interpretation of Dan 8:14.

[11]Bull and Lockhart, pp. 38-39.

[12]Knight, pp. 314-319.

However, certain passages are more important than others, particularly from a *Wirkungsgeschichte* perspective. This is because Seventh-day Adventists believe that at certain key points in Revelation they are specifically identified and addressed as a people. As well as being the proclaimers of the "three angels messages" already referred to above, Seventh-day Adventists also believe that the reference to the 'spirit of prophecy,' found in Rev 19:10, is a specific allusion to their co-founder and prophetess Ellen White. Ingemar Lindén's work The Last Trump contains a valuable study of the rôle of Ellen White's writings and visions in the development of Seventh-day Adventism.[14] Herbert Douglass has produced a very recent, but considerably more partisan, treatment of her role.[15] On the connection with Rev 19:10 Lindén observes:

> At least by 1870 it had become a habit among Sabbatarian Adventists to refer to (Ellen White's) writings as "the Spirit of Prophecy." . . . In Rev 19:10 "the testimony of Jesus" is said to be "the spirit of prophecy." Conclusion: The SDA Church is the only Christian organization.[16]

Rev 12:17 is also seen as a direct prophetic reference to Seventh-day Adventism. "And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ" (KJV). Because they keep the Sabbath commandment, which almost all other Christians break on a weekly basis, Seventh-day Adventists conclude that they are the

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[13]For an analysis of the sociology and self-image of Seventh-day Adventism and its uneasy relationship with American society and religion see M Bull, "The Seventh-day Adventists: Heretics of American Civil Religion", Sociological Analysis 50 (1989): 177-187; and Bull and Lockhart, p. 93f.

[14]I Lindén, The Last Trump: An Historico-genetical study of some of the important chapters in the making and development of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Studien zur interkulturellen Geschichte des Christentums, Band 17 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1978), especially pp. 139-292.

[15]H Douglass, Messenger of the Lord: The Prophetic Ministry of Ellen G White (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1998)

[16]Lindén, p. 284.

obedient ones of the text. As the last group to obey the ten commandments they are at the end of a historical line of faithful ones. Hence they are the "remnant of her seed".

Equally crucial to SDA self-understanding is its relationship to the Laodicean pericope, Rev 3:14-22. A common pursuit within Seventh-day Adventism has been the calculation of "where we are" in terms of proximity to the end and the time prophecies of Daniel and Revelation, but with a careful avoidance of actually setting end-dates.[17] Where Seventh-day Adventism sees itself in terms of the 'time prophecy' of the seven churches of Revelation 2-3 is, of course, crucial to its interpretation of the Laodicean message. An analysis of that interpretation and its *Wirkungsgeschichte* will form the bulk of this chapter. First, however, we will establish the historical and hermeneutical linkage between the Millerite and the Puritan interpretation of the seven messages.

## 4. Puritan Linkage

The Millerite interpretation of Revelation 2-3 was that each church represented a dateable period of ecclesiastical history. This prophetic period was then recapitulated and enlarged on throughout the rest of the Apocalypse.[18] In order to accommodate the elapsed two centuries since schemes like Mede's had been applied to Revelation, Miller needed to alter the dating of the later churches. But the early churches were applied to the same time periods that they had been in seventeenth-century historicist interpretations. Like his Puritan forebears Miller strongly believed that:

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[17]For example, "To those who are following down the track of prophecy, and believe that the present is the period of the Third Message, the question, `Where are we` is of the most thrilling interest." James White, "Where are We?" Review and Herald, Dec 11, 1856, p. 45; also O R Fassett, "Letter" The Advent Review (Aug 1850), pp. 2-3; E Everts, "Communications" Review and Herald, (Jan 1, 1857), p. 72. Many further examples can be found, even in contemporary SDA material.

[18]This was basically the same principle of interpretation as used by Mede, Brightman and others in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. See previous chapter.

> The agreement of the prophecy of the . . . churches with the history of the times . . . is one of the greatest evidences we have of the truth of the divine inspiration of revelation, and this evidence fixes the authenticity of the Scriptures beyond a reasonable doubt.[19]

Miller believed that he was living in the time of the last period of Christian history, Laodicea. He dated this period from 1798 to 1843-4, the end of human history. However, he believed in a form of coexistence between the last two churches Philadelphia and Laodicea, as Brightman had (see above, p. 231). He and other faithful ones would manage to retain their Philadelphian status and character while the rest of Christendom descended into Laodiceanism for the last few decades before the end.[20]

Miller would appear to claim to have developed his prophetic hermeneutics *ex nihilo*. However, it has been clearly shown[21] that the main influences on his interpretation of Revelation were Thomas Newton (1704-1782), John Gill (1697-1771) and George Faber (1773-1854). These writers held to an historicist interpretation[22] for the bulk of Revelation, indeed they "were all men whose work was at the very centre of the historicist tradition."[23] Their hermeneutical ancestry can easily be traced to Bale, Brightman and Mede.

The historicist interpretation of the seven letters was a popular, even majority, view in Britain and North America for more than 200 years. Archbishop Trench felt it had such a following in England, even in the 1860s, that he wrote a special excursus in

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[19]William Miller, Evidence from Scripture and History of the Second Coming of Christ, about the year 1843 (Boston: J V Himes, 1842), p. 145. By 'revelation' here he means all Scripture.

[20]Ibid., pp. 149-152.

[21]See Arasola, pp. 35-48, and S R Rasmussen, "Roots of the Prophetic Hermeneutics of William Miller" (Unpublished MA thesis, Andrews University, 1983), pp. 57-96.

[22]For a definition of "historicism" see above p. 33.

[23]Arasola, p. 47.

his commentary to refute it.[24] Other commentators continued to dispute and counter the view well into the twentieth century as shown in Chapter One, (above pp. 33f). The eighteenth-century historian Granger said that Brightman's historicist commentary on Revelation "for a long time, made a great noise in the world."[25]

John Gill provides the specific connection between Miller and a Brightman-like historicist hermeneutic of the seven churches. Gill, a Baptist dissenter, wrote copiously on Bible prophecy and his exposition of Revelation 2-3 follows the pattern established by Brightman.[26] As usual the churches are assigned specific time periods and historical facts demonstrate the accuracy of the message of each letter as a prediction of the church during each period.[27] Gill's periods for the seven churches are similar to Brightman's but he believes the church of his time to be on the cusp between Sardis and Philadelphia. Philadelphia correlates with an earthly Millennium and Laodicea will be "the church from the end of the spiritual reign of Christ, till the time of his personal appearing and kingdom."[28] So Gill has abandoned Brightman's concept of applying Laodicea to one's own society. Gill is the only one of Miller's confirmed sources[29] to have an historicist interpretation of the churches. However, the hermeneutic was so common place in Miller's day that he would have considered it to be normative.

Miller was a staunch pre-millennialist, believing that the second coming of Christ would occur before a heavenly Millennium. Hence he needed to alter the time scale of the last churches, placing them all before the second advent. It is this pre-millennialism

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[24]Trench, pp. 226-243. But he has respect for the "large body of interpreters, several of these distinguished for their piety and their learning", who hold the view, p. 226.

[25]James Granger, A Biographical History of England, Vol. I, 2nd Ed. (London: 1775), p. 220.

[26]John Gill, An Exposition of the Revelation of St John the Divine (London: 1776), pp. 19-49.

[27]Gill's emphasis on such dissenting groups as the Waldensians and 'Wickliffites', pp. 28-32, was also carried into nineteenth-century Adventist interpretation.

[28]Ibid., p. 45.

that caused Miller to produce different timings for the seven churches from the standard view of Gill, Edward Irving and others, but more in line with Thomas Brightman.

Contemporary 'Adventist' material in England was also mostly historicist in its interpretation of Revelation 2 and 3. In 1830 the paper The Morning Watch (published from 1829-1833 by Edward Irving's movement), dated Sardis from the 1790s until the preparation for the advent; Philadelphia from the preparation to the second coming (the current era); and Laodicea as still future. Laodicea would run from the second coming until the establishment of Christ's throne, a period of great tribulation.[30]

Miller's interpretation of the seven churches was retained by the embryonic SDA movement for about a decade. However, this changed at the instigation of the church's young prophetess Ellen White and her husband James. It will be demonstrated that this was done in order to escape the poor motivational and ecclesiological implications of the Philadelphian pericope. This doctrinal change brought about, almost overnight, the dynamic relationship between the Laodicean letter and Seventh-day Adventism. It also helped bring about revival, repentance, numerical growth and increased missionary activity. The way this change occurred is significant to the study of the motivational dynamics of the call to repentance in the Laodicean message, (Rev 3:14-22).

## B. Post-Disappointment Millerite Interpretation of the Churches

### 1. Fragmentation

The acceptance of Saturday as the biblical Sabbath in 1846 distinguished, and alienated, Ellen White and her circle from the rest of the post-disappointment

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[29]Miller quotes directly from Gill without acknowledging him as a source. Rasmussen, p. 62.
[30]Froom, Prophetic Faith of our Fathers, Vol. III, pp. 504-506.

Millerites.[31] This, along with disagreements about how they must reinterpret Dan 8:14 (the key text which had pinpointed 1844 as the end of time), led to the permanent fragmentation of Miller's diminished following.

In an early SDA publication, of September 1850, Hiram Edson wrote "An Appeal to the Laodicean Church"[32] which was directed specifically at the Sunday-keeping Millerite Adventists. This article, in the official organ of the early SDA church, reveals that Edson, the Whites and others believed that three of the prophetic 'churches' from Revelation 2-3 were currently in existence. These were Sardis, the Protestant churches that rejected the Millerite Advent (and ejected many of his followers); Philadelphia, the Seventh-day Adventists and anyone else who was faithful to New Testament truth (i.e. kept the Sabbath and believed in an imminent advent); and Laodicea, Millerite Adventists who had become "lukewarm". This lukewarmness was specifically demonstrated by their unwillingness to accept the Sabbath truth. Early Seventh-day Adventists also applied the term Laodicean to those Adventists who were attempting to reinterpret the 2300 days prophecy to get another end date.[33]

In his history of early Seventh-day Adventism Damsteegt explains how they viewed their situation in terms of the churches of Revelation 3 thus:

> After the 1844 experience, Sabbatarian Adventists identified themselves with the much desired character of the Philadelphian church, other

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[31]Knight, pp. 295-303.

[32]Hiram Edson, "An Appeal to the Laodicean Church", The Advent Review *Extra* (Sept 1850), pp. 1-4.

[33]Ibid., pp. 2-3.

> Adventists with the Laodicean church, and non-Adventists with the Sardis church.[34]

After the disappointments of 1843 and 1844, there were various attempts to identify a Laodicean element as a scapegoat within the troubled Millerite movement. The interpretation of the seven churches was evidently a prominent device used in the search for one.[35] The fragmentation of their movement is justified by dividing contemporary Protestant Christianity into Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea. The division of prophetic periods into sections like the churches of Revelation or the metals of Daniel 2 helped drive and justify this compartmentalisation.

## 2. Joseph Bates and the Albany Conference

Joseph Bates (1792-1872), another important figure in early Seventh-day Adventism, wrote an article entitled "The Laodicean Church" in the very first issue of the Second Advent Review and Sabbath Herald.[36] Here he specifies an exact time and place for the commencement of the Laodicean church. "We believed that it commenced in 1845, at the conference in the city of Albany, N(ew) Y(ork) with the two leading teachers in the advent cause . . . William Miller and J V Himes."[37] Bates argues that until the Great Disappointment all Adventists were in a state represented by Philadelphia (Rev 3:7-13). Those who then reinterpreted the time elements of the 2300 days entered a spiritual state represented by lukewarm Laodicea. In accordance with the text of Rev

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[34]P G Damsteegt, Foundations of Seventh-day Adventist Message and Mission (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1977), p. 244.

[35]As shown in various articles in the Millerite paper The Voice of Truth (published from Jan 1844 to 1847 after which it became the Advent Harbinger).

[36]Bibliographically this is usually referred to as the Review and Herald, or R & H. It was published more or less monthly until June 1851, then fortnightly until around May 1853 and thence weekly. It became the chief organ of the SDA church and remains so to this day, under the title The Adventist Review, commonly The Review.

3:14-22 they relied on human endeavour, moving away from a reliance on God. Bates believed that he and the other 'Seventh-day' Adventists who stuck to the date Nov 22, 1844, but changed the event that it signified, were still part of pure Philadelphia. He appeals to other 'Albany Conference' Adventists:

> These are the ones we are trying to seek out, by this article, and every other possible way, and show them their perilous and helpless condition, and utter destruction, if they do not forsake them and turn back immediately to the open door[38] in the Philadelphia church; for there is no promise or hope for them where they are.[39]

So at this early stage Seventh-day Adventists had only a proxy relationship with the Laodicean pericope but an immediate one with the Philadelphian. Interpretation of the Laodicean letter was undertaken only in order to identify non-Sabbath keeping Adventists and call them out of their Laodicean state. It was evidently possible within their hermeneutical thinking for people to move between these 'churches' or spiritual conditions. The call to repentance in the Laodicean letter is seen as evidence that "Jesus still loves some that are in the Laodicean church, and calls on them to repent." Laodiceans who are repentant "must get back into the open door in the Philadelphia

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[37]J Bates, "The Laodicean Church", Review and Herald (November 1850), p. 7. At the Albany Conference the bulk of Millerites abandoned linking the 2300 day prophecy with 1844.

[38]Early SDA believed in the "Open and Shut Door", an expression derived from the Philadelphian letter (Rev 3:8), and Christ's 'work' in the heavenly sanctuary. Initially this meant a restriction of salvation to those who had responded to Miller before the Disappointment. Extricating themselves from this restrictive construct was a significant step for early Seventh-day Adventists and may be more closely linked to the interpretation of the seven churches than has previously been thought. See Lindén, pp. 85-99, and "Open and Shut Door" Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopaedia (Washington DC: Review & Herald, 1976), pp. 1034-1037.

[39]Bates, p. 7.

church that no one can shut, where they came from; for that is the only true church, or place of safety."[40]

### 3. A Shut Door

Like other Seventh-day Adventist and Millerites of the time Bates is highly motivated by his eschatological belief that the second Advent is so imminent that his is the very last generation on earth. He sees no point in appealing to those who remained in the 'nominal,' non-Adventist churches, represented by Sardis in his hermeneutical scheme. Those who were responsive to the final message of God to humanity (i.e. the Millerite warning) made their choice before October 1844. The prophecy of Rev 3:1-6 (the letter to Sardis) had already been fulfilled, and the door of salvation had then been shut. Although "Sardis" still existed it represented those who were spiritually dead and beyond hearing any call to repent. "God's people came out from (Sardis) ... at the tenth day of the seventh month, 1844. They (Sardis) were then 'about to die' and are now spiritually dead." Of those called out of that Babylon, however, "the greatest portion are now in the seventh, or Laodicean state of the church."[41]

Bates is writing only six years after the Great Disappointment and it is apparent that the early Seventh-day Adventists still considered themselves to be a part of the larger Millerite Adventist movement at this time. But they believed that they had received a specific mission to keep the movement true to the original understanding of the Dan 8:14 prophecy and introduce it to rediscovered truths such as the seventh-day Sabbath. The hermeneutic device of the seven churches was used in their attempts to accomplish this goal. The repentance call to Laodicea was a tool with which to

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[40]Ibid.

persuade, or threaten, other Millerites into accepting the Seventh-day Adventists' twin concepts of the Sabbath and the retention of 1844 as a significant prophetic event. The shortcomings of Laodicea and its self-delusion, as found in the text of Rev 3:15-18, are specifically applied by Bates to the theological and biblical pronouncements of the mainstream Millerite Albany Conference.

> They are professedly *rich* in Biblical knowledge. Their continued reading and writing on the subject of the advent . . . make them *rich*. And yet they do not know that they are '*wretched* and *miserable* and *poor* and *blind* and *naked*.' How? . . . with all their Bible knowledge, they have not got the meet (*sic*) in due season.[42]

Bates seizes on the Albany Conference Millerites' seeming doctrinal and hermeneutical impasse as a manifestation of their lukewarmness.

> They have only run almost round in a circle, in a five year race, beating the air, and now they declare their starting point from April 29, 1845 to be the best they can give for May 1850. It looks clear that they have acknowledged their Laodicean state of neither cold nor hot. They have neither one position nor yet another.[43]

However, Bates is not just being sanctimonious. He returns to his primary reason for writing his "Appeal to Laodicea" as he brings his article to a close and utilises the promise made to Laodicea in Rev 3:21.

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[41]Ibid. In the Millerite scheme of prophetic calculations Oct 22, 1844 equalled the tenth day of the seventh month of the Jewish calendar, that is, the Day of Atonement.

[42]Ibid. His italics. The last phrase should be "meat in due season", by which he means spiritual truth that would be relevant to the current situation.

[43]Ibid.

> Jesus will commune with you if you open your heart and receive the truth. 'To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne.' Now is the time to repent and turn to the truth. Be quick! Hasten for your life!![44]

4. Philadelphian Seventh-day Adventism

At this stage, circa 1850, early Seventh-day Adventists did not recognise the need for repentance and increased zeal within their own ranks. Their prime task was to reform Millerite Adventism which, due to the "shut door" doctrine, was their only mission field.[45] The fact that no appeal to repentance is found in the Philadelphian letter, which they believed addressed and defined them, must be partly to blame for their somewhat conceited attitude. With Rev 3:7-13 containing only praise and affirmation it was difficult to be self-critical.

In addition James White, Seventh-day Adventism's chief writer and spokesperson of the time, even used the text of the Philadelphian letter as a partial justification for Seventh-day Adventists being the 144,000 of Rev 14:1-5.

> The history and description of the 144,000 apply to those who are to be changed at the coming of the Lord, and no other class. First '*having his Father's name written in their foreheads.*' Said the true Witness to the Philadelphia church, . . . I will WRITE UPON HIM THE NAME OF MY GOD.' Where? 'In their FOREHEADS,' just where John saw the 'Father's name.' Now just as sure as the Philadelphia church is the true

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[44]Ibid. His emphases.
[45]For a detailed discussion of the "Shut Door" concept see Lindén, pp. 85-105.

> church of the last days, just so sure the 144,000 are sealed, just before the coming of the Lord.[46]

Although being the '144,000' never became official SDA doctrine it demonstrates that, motivated in part by their self-understanding as Philadelphia, early Seventh-day Adventists were becoming complacent and elitist.

## C. A Radical Change in the Interpretation of the Seven Churches

### 1. The Weaknesses of Being Philadelphia

As was observed with the examination of seventeenth-century exegesis in the last chapter, the Philadephian pericope appears not to contain the necessary rhetorical dynamics to motivate a successful ecclesiastical movement or organisation, (see above pp. 264f). It is possible that this was one of the reasons why the early SDA church quickly abandoned their self-identification with the Philadelphian church. It may also explain why so little contemporary material exists to justify the doctrine.[47]

The earliest SDA periodicals, Present Truth and The Advent Review[48] issued from July 1849 to November 1850, show an overwhelming concern for Seventh-day Adventists to prove themselves right on the Sabbath and on the meaning of the 1844 disappointment to the other Millerites. "But it seems that the attention on the Sabbath crowded out proper attention to nurturing the believers in spiritual growth. Also, the

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[46]James White, "The One Hundred and Forty Four Thousand" The Advent Review (Sept 1850), p. 56. His emphases.

[47]In the decade from the beginning of separate Seventh-day Adventist publishing (c. 1846) to the time when identification with Philadelphia was abandoned (late 1856) only about 20 articles or letters were published with any reference to the doctrine. Thousands were published on the seventh-day Sabbath doctrine during this period, and when self-identification with Laodicea was introduced, hundreds of letters and articles appeared within just the first few months. see below, p. 289.

[48]Not to be confused with The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald (usually abbreviated to Review and Herald or R & H), which replaced it around the end of November 1850.

certainty of being right generates complacence and spiritual pride.'"[49] This complacency must have been exacerbated by the influence of the Philadelphian letter, the 'Open and Shut Door' doctrine, and speculation about being the sealed 144,000 of Rev 14:1. An increase in growth and a great broadening of evangelistic activity shortly after these doctrines were abandoned is probably not coincidental and may be highly significant.

By the mid-1850s, a decade since the "Great Disappointment", Miller was dead, and his following was badly fragmented. Seventh-day Adventism was developing into a church in need of structure, hierarchy and motivational self-criticism. James and Ellen White were in the forefront of this criticism although her rôle of church prophet was not yet universally accepted or appreciated.[50] She and James believed that her visionary reproofs were not being received with the proper authority. Lorenz points out that "Because of prejudice, the Review and Herald did not discuss her vision (*sic*) directly at that time,"[51] and that many of her rebukes were directed at SDA clergy.

## 2. Visions of Reproof

These visions of reproof began as early as 1850 (when Ellen White was only 23) with her message "To the Little Flock" in which she says "I saw that some of the people of God are stupid and dormant and but half awake."[52] Other visionary calls to repent and reform continue in a similar Laodicean vein. In the Review and Herald of June 10, 1852 Ellen White applies Laodicea to certain people within the church. "The words addressed to the Laodicean Church, describe their present condition perfectly."[53] To have

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[49]F A Lorenz, The Only Hope (Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, 1976), p. 25.

[50]On the rise of the prophetic authority of Ellen White see Bull and Lockhart, pp. 21-32, also Lindén, pp. 191-193 and 197.

[51]Lorenz, p. 29.

[52]Ellen White, "To the 'Little Flock'", The Present Truth (April 1850), pp. 71-72.

[53]Ellen White, "To the Brethren and Sisters", Review and Herald (June 10, 1852), p. 21.

continued with this type of criticism without changing their interpretation of Revelation 3 would have threatened the unity of the church's systematic historicist interpretation of Revelation as a whole. Pinpointing a specific Laodicean element within the denomination would have been as divisive as it had been among the rest of the Millerites. In fact the text itself makes such elitism difficult. Likewise the Laodicean label and text could not be applied while the church officially considered itself to be Philadelphia and branded those who opposed it as Laodicea.

By 1856 it had become obvious, at least to the Whites, that things needed to change. Due to the reinterpretation of the 'Open and Shut Door'[54] doctrine to allow salvation for all, the original interpretation of the churches had become more or less untenable. This, and Ellen White's reproofs of the church, must have convinced James White that the church was no longer Philadelphia, if indeed it had ever been. Using his position as acting editor of the Review and Herald he sought to change radically the church's interpretation of Revelation 2-3. It seems evident that he did this without consulting other church leaders.

### 3. James White's Ground-Breaking New Hermeneutic

White's short, but seminal article "Watchman, What of the Night?" of Oct 9, 1856,[55] challenged the official position by first querying the inconsistency of three churches coexisting within a historicist framework.

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[54]The "shut door" aspect, which excluded all non-Millerites from salvation, was abandoned by Seventh-day Adventists in the early 1850s. For a discussion of its impact on SDA identity see Bull and Lockhart's chapter "Identity," pp. 33-43.

[55]James White, "Watchman, What of the Night?", Review and Herald (Oct 9, 1856), p. 184.

> Do the seven churches, (Rev. ii, 11.) represent seven conditions of the *true Church*, in seven periods of time? If so, then is the view erroneous that the Philadelphia and Laodicean states both exist at the same time?[56]

However, his primary argument was not based on exegetical logic but on experience. He asks the church "Does not the state of the Laodiceans (lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot) fitly illustrate the condition of the body of those who profess the Third Angel's Message?"[57]

In the next issue of the Review and Herald White lays out his interpretation of the churches in much fuller detail.[58] Here he reiterates the standard historicist view on the first four churches. Then he places Sardis entirely in the past ending its epoch with the formation of Miller's movement; the Philadelphian period is squeezed into the few years of the Millerite movement up to, and including, "the end of the 2300 days, in 1844."[59] Thus Laodicea begins after the "Great Disappointment." White summarises the change of position thus:

> It has been supposed that the Philadelphian church reached to the end. This we must regard as a mistake, as the seven churches in Asia represent seven distinct periods of the *true church*, and the Philadelphia (*sic*) is the sixth, and not the last state. The true church cannot be in two conditions at the same time, hence we are shut up to the faith that the Laodicean church represents the church of God at the present time.[60]

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[56]Ibid.

[57]Ibid. By "those who profess the Third Angel's Message" he means Seventh-day Adventists. As pointed out above. p. 275. this term is of defining significance to the Seventh-day Adventist *raison d'être*.

[58]James White. "The Seven Churches". Review and Herald (Oct 16. 1856). pp. 188-192.

[59]Ibid.. p. 189.

[60]Ibid. His emphases. "Shut up to the faith" seems to mean 'have to accept that'.

By the use of the terms "true church" and "church of God at the present time" it is evident that James White means specifically, and probably exclusively, the Seventh-day Adventist church. Thus the seven churches of Revealtion 2-3 were not prophetic representations of all christendom through the ages but only the 'true church' of which Seventh-day Adventism was now the remnant and heir.

## 4. The Church's Reaction to Being Laodicea

On November 6, only three issues later, the Review and Herald printed two letters supporting White's view. One was from Stephen N Haskell (1833-1922), later a prominent SDA leader. Haskell states his conviction that "I have for some time been led to believe that the message to the Laodiceans belongs to us."[61] Over the next few weeks White continued to build his case and by the end of November, the new position had become the official standpoint of the church. Ellen White's visionary ratification of the position came sometime in 1857.[62]

The letters that came in to the Review and Herald constitute the most accurate evaluation of how readily the church accepted the changed position. During the fourteen months from November 1856, through to the end of 1857, over 300 items appeared in the Review and Herald on the Laodicean message. White and other editors wrote sixteen, ministers wrote seventy and over two hundred came from lay members. In view

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[61]Stephen N Haskell, "A few thoughts on the Philadelphia and Laodicean Churches", Review and Herald (Nov 6, 1856), p. 6.

[62]Ellen White's visionary material was not published in Review and Herald at this stage but delivered orally. It is therefore difficult to say exactly when her ratification came. Popular SDA accounts of this episode bring it forward into 1856 and thus give major credit for the change to Ellen White, e.g. R L Odom "Who are the Laodiceans?" Review and Herald, Jan 12, 1956, p. 6, and G Land (ed.), Adventism in America (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1986), p. 55. However, this reflects a tendency by modern Seventh-day Adventists to retroactively elevate her role. Her first published support for the Laodicean hermeneutic did not come until the privately published pamphlet "Testimony No. 3: Be Zealous and Repent" in 1857. This was then included, some decades later, in Testimonies for the Church, Vol. I (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press, 1948), pp. 141-146.

of the size of the church at the time this was a massive response, representing over ten percent of the Review and Herald's total readership.[63] There was no dissent at all, although with White as editor, the published picture may not be a complete representation of feelings within the church. However, dissent on other issues and even protracted argument was fairly common in the Review and Herald at this time. So it is safe to assume that the new interpretation of Revelation 2-3 was enthusiastically received, and accepted as truth, by the membership.

Seventh-day Adventists universally believed that this new interpretation represented a sound systematisation of Revelation 2-3, post 'shut door.' The Laodicean letter also accurately described the state of their church and offered the remedy to the impasse it had reached. Many members took the trouble to report that the call to repent was being heeded and that "Those who heed the message to the Laodicean church have the high and exalted position of communing with the blessed Son of God.."[64] The correspondence in the Review and Herald, from December 1856 onward, indicates a willing acceptance of the Laodicean message by the SDA community. The ministry and membership were glad to receive the chastisement that Rev 3:14-22 delivers. Its application in local congregations was deemed beneficial, causing revivals and increased zeal. An example of this is found in a letter by L B Abbey:

> But O how condescending is our dear Saviour, to give this counsel to us, in a time when we were in so much need of it; and has enabled many to heed it. And they are endeavoring to sanctify themselves, that they may

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[63]The first estimate of SDA membership was 3,500 made in 1863, see R W Schwanz, Light Bearers to the Remnant (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press, 1979), p. 151. Membership in 1856-7 would have been less. However even if it, plus the non-SDA readership of Review and Herald, was near the 1863 figure, the number of individuals responding in writing to this issue was between eight to ten percent of the total sphere of the church's influence. In reality it was probably a higher percentage.

> obtain that gold which will enable them to stand in the trying day that is just before us.[65]

## 5. Practical Results and Hermeneutical Reinforcement

It would also appear that the new interpretation brought about an increase in the members' financial support of the denomination. Joseph Bates gives this report of a revival meeting in November 1856 at Monterey, Michigan during which the very new interpretation of the seven churches was preached on.

> The word of the Lord was listened to with deep interest, and the meeting continued to rise to its close. When the subject of our lukewarm position in the Laodicean state of the church came up, there seemed to be almost a universal response to "bring all the tithes into the storehouse, and prove the Lord to open the windows of heaven, and pour upon his waiting children the promised blessing."[66]

In mid-1857 James White discovered that a remote group of Seventh-day Adventists in Waukon, Iowa did not want to accept the new interpretation. Ellen White was prompted by a vision to make the difficult 200 mile trip just in order to correct them. This incident was written up later by another prominent church leader J N Loughborough (1832-1924).[67] In a meeting with the rebels Ellen White had another vision which caused them all tearfully to repent. Many letters recounted how the

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[64]F M Bragg. "Letter". Review and Herald (Dec 2. 1856). p. 51.

[65]L B Abbey. "Letter from Sister Abbey". Review and Herald (May 7. 1857). pp. 6-7.

[66]Joseph Bates. "Conference at Monterey. Mich(igan)". Review and Herald (Dec 4. 1856). p. 40. Similarly E Goodwin. "Letter". Review and Herald (Oct 30. 1856). p. 206.

[67]John N Loughborough. "Sketches of the Past. No 102." Pacific Union Recorder. Aug 18. 1910. pp. 5-6.

Laodicean message had brought people to confession, repentance and renewal. This included ministry, laity and whole congregations alike.

But James White still complained that the message had not been fully accepted. In an editorial entitled "Eastern Tour"[68] he implies that Ellen White had a vision at a camp meeting and that "The testimony given was that the counsel to the Laodiceans had not been fully heeded." These prophetic ratifications of James White's view via his wife's visions in 1856-7[69] were very significant events for the development, and later use, of this SDA doctrine. James and Ellen White's further use of Rev 3:14-22 will be explored below, (see pp. 301f).

Before the end of 1857 the bi-directional 'carrot and stick' motivational dynamic of the text of the Laodicean letter is clearly being utilised. A S Hutchins wrote:

> When the light first shone out on this subject, it was set home most powerfully by the spirit of God, to the hearts of those who acknowledge and receive its proper application. . . . Many were zealous in their work of repentance. . . . But for a time past I have been led to ask the question, what has become of the council to the Laodiceans? Why is there so little said on this subject? . . . What means the stupor, the calm that has come over the people of God?[70]

Hutchins was apparently "worn out" in his attempts to motivate the lukewarm church.[71]

> This demonstrates the rhetorical dynamics of Rev 3:14-22. There is always room for improvement, lukewarmness is inescapable for more than a moment. Identifying with

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[68]James White, "Eastern Tour", Review and Herald (June 4, 1857), p. 36.

[69]First published as a pamphlet "My Christian Experiences" (Battle Creek, Michigan: James White, 1860). Subsequently in Ellen White, Testimonies for the Church, Vol. I, pp. 141-153.

[70]A S Hutchins, "Counsel to Laodiceans", Review and Herald (Sept 3, 1857), p. 141.

[71]James White, "Eastern Tour", Review and Herald (June 4, 1857), p. 36.

the text enables it to act on the community as a perpetual stick and a perpetual carrot, and as used by Seventh-day Adventists it is a highly effective motivator of church growth, holiness and humility. There is no eighth church to advance into. So the cycle of 'lukewarmness - repentance - zeal' can be, and indeed was, continually rediscovered and reapplied. This, and the motivational depth and scope of the Laodicean pericope, is suitably illustrated in R F Cottrell's 1857 piece, "Laodicean State":

> We understand that the Laodicean is the last state of the true church on earth. This being the case, to get out of the Laodicean state would be to get out of the church of God. We should arise from our *lukewarm* state and remain in the *Laodicean*. From the description given of this church, as lukewarm, the *modern* definition of Laodicean is lukewarm in religion. But the original definition is "a just people," all should repent of their lukewarmness and strive to be found in the true Laodicean state.[72]

Cottrell's desire to reform "Laodicea" from within, without causing fragmentation, is reminiscent of Brightman, (see above p. 262). Although there are problems within the church, he recognises that it is still the true church. It is possible to remain Laodicea whilst shaking off lukewarmness, and thus to reach the ideal "true Laodicean state". Cottrell's language is both conciliatory and inclusive.

## 6. Summary

Once established therefore, the application of Laodicea to Seventh-day Adventism became a powerful, though double edged, device. It helped to shape the church's self image and motivate it to greater evangelistic endeavour. It also provided a

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[72]R F Cottrell, "Laodicean State", Review and Herald (March 19, 1857), p. 157, his italics.

self-regulating reprimand which helped prevent Seventh-day Adventists from becoming complacent or thinking too highly of themselves, spiritually speaking. Indeed:

> This anti-triumphalism in the Laodicean context has continued to be an important factor in the SDA theology of mission up till the present. It has not only improved the spiritual climate for mission but has also provided a rationale for the delay of the parousia.[73]

This may have been a factor in the Seventh-day Adventism's long-term survival, giving it a strength that most of the other post-disappointment Millerite fragments lacked.

## D. Application of Rev 3:14-21 Within the Early SDA Church

### 1. Influence of the Text

The influence of the Laodicean pericope will now be explored by highlighting two areas of Seventh-day Adventist experience that relate to it closely. The first of these is found in the responses sent in to the Review and Herald by SDA laity and clergy during the eighteen months after the new hermeneutic was devised. The second is the use made of the Laodicean message by Ellen and James White over the following decades to motivate the church to greater evangelistic endeavour and continuing repentance. The examination of primary source material in these areas will help to demonstrate the scope of the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of Rev 3:14-22 in the SDA community during the second half of the nineteenth century.

The rapid acceptance of the reinterpreted Laodicean message, following James White's articles and preaching tours, is demonstrated not only by personal reminiscences of the time but by the flood of letters on the subject that were published in the Review

and Herald over the following months. From the text of these letters we are able to build a picture of the influence that the Laodicean letter was having upon individual members, congregations and the movement as a whole. Because of the vast amount of material involved (more than 300 letters over eighteen months) the following does not represent an exhaustive appraisal of the influence of the text. However, the samples taken are representative and germane.

## 2. Summary and Analysis of Responses to the New Hermeneutic

### a. F M Bragg - Dec 18, 1856

Bragg begins by recognising his church in the text of Rev 3:14-22:

> We are a favoured people . . . there is a peculiar fitness and force to the message to the Laodicean church when applied to us. . . . with how much force should it come home to us . . . when our efforts are so faint and feeble and our lives so illy (*sic*) comport with this faith.[74]

The new hermeneutic has evidently reinforced this writer's eschatological hope and expectation:

> I believe the sifting time has come, and those who do not repent ... and heed the exhortation to buy gold tried in the fire (get pure love,) white raiment, (be clothed with the righteousness of Christ,) eye-salve, (receive the anointing of the Spirit,) will soon be spued out of God's mouth.[75]

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[73]Damsteegt, p. 248.
[74]F M Bragg, "Our Present Condition", Review and Herald (Dec 18, 1856), p. 51.
[75]Ibid. His parenthesis.

It has also given him a heightened sense of denominational importance, "Shall we like ancient Israel prove indifferent to our sad condition . . ." The positive motivational dynamics of the letter are not lost on him either:

> Those who heed the message to the Laodicean church have the high and exalted position of communing with the blessed Son of God. . . . Those who welcome him in will be made like unto his lovely image, and will forever reign with him.[76]

Both the eschatological and christological functions of the text help motivate both congregation and individual to strive to prepare for the receiving of the ultimate reward.

b. R F Cottrell, - Dec 25, 1856

Cottrell's letter reflects the effect of the new interpretation on specific SDA congregations:

> I have just returned from a visit to Barre and Orangeport . . . The testimony to the Laodicean church was considered, and all seemed willing to receive the rebuke of the True Witness, and be zealous and repent. I believe that the time is come for the Message[77] to rise, and the people of the Lord, who have, for years, enjoyed the light of present truth, must be zealous in the cause or be left behind.[78]

So Seventh-day Adventists were corporately and individually aware of being Laodicea and were influenced by this awareness and by the details of the text itself. The threats

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[76]Ibid.

[77]The "Message" in this context refers to the Seventh-day Adventist church and its distinctive truths.

[78]R F Cottrell, "Letter", Review and Herald (Dec 25, 1856), p. 61.

and promises of the letter were seen as motivators that were needed to give them the necessary energy to finish their task.

c. A S Hutchins - Jan 8, 1857

Details from the text of the Laodicean letter also inform a report sent to the Review and Herald of an SDA conference held at Wolcott, Vermont late in 1856.

> The light which had just begun to dawn upon us, respecting the Laodicean church, led to a searching of our hearts; and the exhortation . . . "be zealous therefore and repent" gave edge to the testimony of the brothers and sisters. . . . a happy change is taking place among us. The solemn and stirring message to us, Laodiceans, is arousing the Church to action *now*.[79]

Using the language of Revelation, Hutchins describes real evidence of repentance and spiritual growth:

> We now hear much said about the "gold, white raiment, and eye-salve" and less about farms, houses and the vanities of this life. . . . The child of a few years of age, begins to mingle its sweet little voice in prayer with its parents, for the first time. . . . Sad and fearful will be the doom of such as are not moved out from their lukewarmness, by the warning to the last stage of the Church.[80]

Hence a recognition of the Laodicean passage as a prophetic message specifically intended for them, and describing them, caused a heightened spirituality without a sense of self-satisfaction. Phrases such as "the warning to the last stage of the Church" show

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[79]A S Hutchins, "Conference at Walcott, Vt.", Review and Herald (Jan 8, 1857), p. 80. His emphases.

that the text was reinforcing their eschatological hope in the Second Advent of Christ. What is more the warnings to Laodicea were also felt to be assisting the general repentance taking place throughout the church.

d. Other Letters

Every single issue of Review and Herald from January to July of 1857 (during which time it appeared weekly) had an article or letter on the subject of Laodicea and most issues carried four or five. Letters from individuals repeatedly related cases of Rev 3:14-22 causing major reappraisals of personal spirituality and heart-felt repentance.

> I praise the Lord that . . . we have been brought to see that we are living in the Laodicean state of the church. . . . God's people are to be purified from all dross, purged as silver and gold, and made white.[81]
>
> I believe the counsel to the lukewarm Laodiceans is present truth . . . O how wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked I found myself . . . I began zealously to repent and confess my sins.[82]

However, the positive motivational forces of the pericope are also seen by the church members, giving them a sense of eschatological hope thus:

> The pilgrim's pathway to the eternal city lies through Laodicea, and may we not rejoice that we are there? for it is the last place which the Holy Spirit has marked to be trodden by the feet of the children of God this side of Mt. Zion. It seems to me that a knowledge of the fact that we are already in Laodicea should send a thrill of joy through every one . . . and

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[80]Ibid.

[81]Letter from B F Weed, Review and Herald (Jan 22, 1857), p. 94.

by keeping the commandments to gain an entrance through the gates into that city.[83]

e. Summary

The primary (recorded) effect of the recognition of the application of the Laodicean passage was repentance on a personal level and revival on a congregational level. For the SDA church as a whole the primary influence of the passage was an enlarged missiological vision and numerical growth. Ironic though it may seem, when the SDA church realised that it was lukewarm, poor, wretched, naked and blind, rather than being the perfect church of brotherly love, its morale soared and its congregations swelled. This, however, is in keeping with the Laodicean text's rhetorical power to effect change in those who relate to it specifically.

## 3. Utilisation of the Laodicean Message by James and Ellen White

During the decades following the introduction and acceptance of the new interpretation James and Ellen White frequently used the concept of Laodicea and the text of Rev 3:14-22 for the castigation and motivation of the church, reprimanding laity and ministry alike. Ellen White gave prophetic ratification to the new hermeneutic early in 1857[84] and continued to emphasise it in her copious writing until her death in 1915, using the Laodicean theme thousands of times. James also returned to his watershed hermeneutic on many occasions.

The following examples highlight the *Wirkungsgeschichte* elements of usage; that is, the way in which the specifics of the biblical text influenced beliefs, attitudes,

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[82]Letter from Mary Priest, Review and Herald (Feb 19, 1857), p. 127.
[83]C R Austin, "Letter", Review and Herald (Apr 9, 1857), p. 183.
[84]See footnote relating to her prophetic ratification above, p. 291.

behaviour and ecclesiological dynamics. Due to the ample amounts of material this study will be limited to the uses of the Laodicean theme that are most germane.

a. Individual and Corporate Chastening

Ellen White often used the Laodicean hermeneutic in personal letters to members whom she individually chastised, applying the characteristics of Laodicea to their spiritual shortcomings. In a letter to Brother 'G', a church leader who had evidently expressed doctrinal doubts and threatened to leave church office, she begins by telling him that he should "accept light and come out of darkness."[85] The light she proceeds to give him is that:

> The Laodicean message applies to the people of God who profess to believe present truth. The greater part are lukewarm professors, having a name but no zeal . . . they profess to love the truth, yet are deficient in Christian fervor and devotion.[86]

She uses the Laodicean characteristic of lukewarmness to reprimand Brother 'G' for his lack of commitment toward church responsibility. "They (Laodiceans) do not engage heartily in the work of God . . . but they hold aloof and are ready to leave their posts when their worldly personal interests demand it."[87]

In an address entitled "The Laodicean Church" given not long after the new hermeneutic was accepted, Ellen White starts by saying:

> Dear Brethren and Sisters: The Lord has shown me in vision some things concerning the church in its present lukewarm state, which I will relate to

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[85]Ellen White, Testimonies for the Church, Vol. IV, p. 83. This letter was originally written in 1876.

[86]Ibid., p. 87.

[87]Ibid., p. 88.

you. The church was presented before me in vision. Said the angel to the church: "Jesus speaks to thee, 'Be zealous and repent.'" This work, I saw, should be taken hold of in earnest. There is something to repent of. Worldly-mindedness, selfishness, and covetousness have been eating out the spirituality and life of God's people.[88]

In this paragraph we observe the identification of the church with the name and characteristics of Rev 3:14-22. Ellen White rhetorically identifies herself, the deliverer of the message, with the angel who speaks to the church, as opposed to the angel <u>of</u> the church. By saying "this work should be taken hold of earnestly" she implies that no previous spiritual efforts made by Seventh-day Adventists were good enough. She also specifies the sins that need to be repented of. This is done by making the moral exhortation to abandon "worldly-mindedness, selfishness, and covetousness." Here the influence of the text guides her to list sins that are not so vague as to be unidentifiable, nor so specific that any reader might feel exempt from the reproof that she draws from the text.

b. <u>Establishing the Rôle of the Whites via the Hermeneutic</u>

In 1873 James White wrote an article entitled simply "Earnest Appeal".[89] It is addressed, with a certain amount of sarcasm and bitterness, to "the General Conference Committee,[90] the 'Picked Men' at Battle Creek[91], the Committees of the State Conferences." The article deliberately uses the Laodicean hermeneutic to reinforce the powerful rôle of the Whites within Seventh-day Adventism. White begins by referring to

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[88]Ibid., Vol. I, p. 141. Originally written in November 1857. (By 'church' she means the Seventh-day Adventist church.)

[89]James White, "An Earnest Appeal", <u>Review and Herald</u> (Sept 2, 1873), pp. 92-93.

[90]The governing body of the church, elected from the ministry on an annual basis.

a spiritual retreat he and Ellen had been on during which they were both impressed[92] by the need for redoubled efforts in spreading the truth. In particular there was a need to revive the church employees who had become lacklustre, complacent and slack in their efforts. The following quotation demonstrates how he calls on his readers to recognise themselves in the Laodicean letter, apply its rebuke and ponder its threats.

> But, dear brethren, our people are in a fearful condition before God . . . the testimony of the True Witness to the church of the Laodiceans, Rev 3:14-22, applies to our time and our people. And this position seems to be ably defended, and sustained by overwhelming evidences . . . Our present confidence as a people that we have the truth, and that God is with us, while we are so far separated from him by the love of this world, self-confidence, and, with many a decided hatred to reproof, gives point and force to the rebuke of the Son of God to the last church (quotes Rev 3:15-19). Dear brethren, it is not enough for us to simply admit the correct application of this startling rebuke to ourselves at the present time. We should ponder its fearful import with care, and let its terrific threatening move us to immediate action.[93]

White then relates how the "Spirit of Prophecy"[94] has warned people about their poor spiritual condition and their need to repent, but this counsel has been ignored and neglected. People used to be happy to take such rebuke but now, "They feel assured that

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[91]This was the most important institutional centre of Seventh-day Adventism at the time and included a ministerial training college, a hospital and the General Conference headquarters office.

[92]The implication is of Divine revelation.

[93]James White, "An Earnest Appeal", p. 92.

[94]A term used, then and now, to mean his wife's prophetic and visionary messages to the church. The title is taken from Rev 19:10 which is seen as a prediction of her gift within Seventh-day Adventism.

we have the truth, and that the Lord is with us; and they conclude that these continued reproofs and warnings hinder the progress of the cause."[95] White declares his dismay and alarm that this attitude is growing rapidly.

Evidently the Whites felt threatened because people were not listening to Ellen's criticisms. Hence they used the devices of the Laodicean message in order to impose their prophetic authority upon the church and its governing body, the General Conference. They reminded the people and leaders that their lukewarmness, rejection of reproof, and unawareness of spiritual poverty, was a direct fulfilment of the prophecy of the Laodicean letter. Thus the text of Rev 3:14-22 is used to condemn complacency, cause redoubled evangelistic effort, keep the people in line and maintain the rôle of the church's prophet.

> . . . this testimony to the church of the Laodiceans is from the *True* Witness. It is from the Son of God. It appeals to our people at <u>present critical hour</u>. It describes their true condition of blindness as to their standing before God; and nothing has done so much to bring our people into this condition as the influence of those who have cherished a feeling of dislike, . . . determined hatred, against the reproofs which the Lord has given his people through his faithful servants. [96]

The implication of the phrase "through his faithful servants" is that the message comes to the church via the faithful service of John of Patmos and then Ellen (and possibly James) White.

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[95]James White. "An Earnest Appeal". p. 92.
[96]Ibid., p. 92. His italics, my underlining.

c. The Rhetorical Situation

From a rhetorical critical perspective this is significant. The Whites place themselves within a rhetorical framework that is greatly influenced by the rhetorical structure of the Laodicean pericope itself. In White's final paragraph of his "Earnest Appeal" he justifies his attack on the General Conference Committee thus:

> We address you, dear brethren, because, in the providence of God, it has fallen to your lot to bear the responsibility of the cause of such magnitude and vast importance. It is right that our people should look to you to lead out in the cause of present truth.[97]

If they are lukewarm and blind to the reproof, the church will be as well, but if they are faithful then the church will prosper as it follows them.

The remarkable rhetorical situation established in this article is the same as in those of Ellen White. Particularly in the salutation, but also in the body of the article, James White's rhetorical alignment can be represented in table form, thus:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| James and Ellen White | = | St John |
| The General Conference and other SDA leaders | = | the angel of the Laodicean church |
| The rest of the SDA Movement | = | the Laodicean community |

It is significant that he and his wife are the channels through which this divine prophetic message is directed to latter-day Laodicea and its 'angels.' By implication he therefore claims the authority of the New Testament's greatest prophetic genius and, for Seventh-day Adventists at least, its second most important figure after Jesus.

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[97]Ibid., p. 93.

d. Unity

Despite such a rhetorical hierarchy Laodicea cannot be a divided church, as seen in the previous interpretive community, (above p. 262f). All Laodiceans are equally lukewarm and in need of repentance. The text does not call for a separation from sinful factions such as Jezebel, Balaam or the Nicolaitans, as other letters in Revelation 2-3 do. White stays true to this aspect of the text as Brightman did. At the end of his "Earnest Appeal" he becomes conciliatory, offering hope and admitting that every one is a sinner. If the remnant "repent zealously" the Lord will convict them all of their sins so they can confess them, "put them away and draw very near to the Lord."[98]

Ellen White had a visionary warning that the church might become divided between those who heeded the message and those who did not. She was also shown that it was the Laodicean testimony that would produce a 'shaking' in the church and bring about a great change.[99] However, what appears to have actually happened is that fears of another fragmentation pulled the church together, and that the Laodicean self-image assisted in this unification. Neither Ellen or James White ever used the Laodicean hermeneutic to establish a spiritual elite or call for separation.

e. Reinforcing SDA Identity as the Eschatological Remnant

James White has another agenda in his "Earnest Appeal", which is to draw the church's attention to their privileged, remnant position, right in the prophetic spotlight of the text of Revelation as it were.

> The deception upon the minds of our people is a fearful one. The prophecy to the last stage of the church of Jesus Christ given AD 96,

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[98]Ibid., p. 93.

> looks forward nearly eighteen hundred years, to 1873, and describes, with minute exactness, the condition of things among us, (and) utters a terrific warning of utter rejection without zealous repentance . . .[100]

However, the text refuses to allow only castigation and the positive motivators that flow on directly in the text have to be acknowledged and utilised in any honest interpretation of the passage. In this respect White is influenced by the rhetorical strategy of the text. He continues the sentence thus:

> . . . in strains of fullest benevolence and tenderest affection, promises the nearest and dearest communion with Christ to all who hear the voice of warning and open the door of their hearts by zeal in repenting of the sins which have barred the dear Saviour from them.[101]

The text serves to remind Seventh-day Adventists that they are the seventh, and thus last, church. Either a spewing out of Christ's mouth, or a heavenly banquet, is about to occur at any moment. There is an inherent tension in the situation that might spring them either way. Which way they go depends on how well they respond to the prophetic messages, ancient and modern.

Decades after the church accepted the new interpretation Ellen White still uses it to emphasise the linkage between the SDA church, heaven and Christ - the "true witness" of Rev 3:14. The fact that Seventh-day Adventists conform to the description of Laodicea is an ironic reminder that they are the remnant church, that heaven addresses them directly and exclusively and that they should be motivated by

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[99]Ellen White, "The Shaking", in Early Writings (Washington DC: Review & Herald, 1942), pp. 269-273.

[100]James White, "An Earnest Appeal", p. 92.

[101]Ibid.

eschatological hope. But there will never be any room for complacency or self-congratulation. A quarter of a century after Seventh-day Adventists first accepted the Laodicean call to repent, Ellen White begins a lead article in the Review and Herald with a statement that demonstrates the perpetual aptness of Rev 3:14-22: "Be zealous and repent is the admonition of Jesus to the Laodicean church. There is something to repent of."[102]

Seventh-day Adventism's doctrine of the remnant is usually seen to be supported by their reading of Revelation 12 and 14. However, it is evident from this study that Rev 3:14-22 should also be acknowledged in this aspect of SDA self-identity.

f. Explaining the Delay: SDA Cognitive Dissonance

Ellen White introduces an element of delay to the prophecy's application because she saw the need to protract the influencing work of the message. "I saw that this message would not accomplish its work in a few short months . . . God has given the message time to do its work."[103] She also utilises the Laodicean hermeneutic to explain the delay in the second coming, "Nearly all believed that this message would end in the loud cry of the third angel.[104] But as they failed to see the powerful work accomplished in a short time, many lost the effect of the message."[105]

Ellen White also deals with the 'failure' of the Laodicean message itself at an early stage.[106] The reasons for its failure are also the reasons for its successful application and fulfilment; hardness of heart; impatience that Christ did not return immediately upon its acceptance; lukewarm reception of the message; unwillingness to

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[102]Ellen White, "Be Zealous and Repent", Review and Herald (Sept 4, 1883), p. 561.
[103]Ellen White, Testimonies for the Church, Vol. I, p. 186.
[104]'Loud cry of the third angel' is a euphemism for the second coming of Christ.
[105]Ellen White, Testimonies for the Church, Vol. I, p. 186.
[106]Ellen White, Testimonies for the Church, Vol. I, pp. 185f.

be purified; worldliness; delusions of holiness and so forth. The cognitive dissonance caused by the 'Great Disappointment', the delayed second coming and being Laodicea combine within Seventh-day Adventism in a unique fashion. The result, however, is a robust and highly motivated organisation.

g. Summary

Although the examples above concentrate primarily on the castigation or 'stick' element of the letter, the Whites were also able to utilise the positive, motivational 'carrot' elements.[107] This demonstrates that the text was influencing them, rather than just being exploited by them. Whether or not this usage of the letter was consciously done for the motives I have suggested above is difficult to say. But it is evident that from early on Ellen White was aware of the potential power of the pericope to influence people and generate repentance.

Because lukewarmness is such a relative term and all ecclesiastical organisations oscillate in growth and spirituality, once the SDA church adopted this self image it could not escape its powerful dynamic. This was also evident from the beginning of its 'discovery'. As early as June 1857, James White caricatures the church's lack of concern for its members in Laodicean terms: "but few Sabbath-keepers have received into their hearts the testimony to the Laodiceans."[108] This was a prophecy that, because of its terminology, rhetorical dynamic and the way the SDA community applied it, was at once instantly self-fulfilling and self-perpetuating.

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[107]Many other examples could be sited in support. e.g. Ellen White, "Be Zealous and Repent". pp. 561-562.

[108]James White, "Eastern Tour", Review and Herald (June 25, 1857), p. 61. And a few months later A S Hutchins, "Counsel to the Laodiceans", p. 141, outlines how the new truth about Laodicea was first accepted enthusiastically and then gradually ignored.

## E. Continuation of Laodicean Influence in the SDA Church

The 'carrot and stick' dynamics of Rev 3:14-22 has continued to shape and motivate the SDA church down to the present day. A detailed study of the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the pericope to the present time would demonstrate the perpetual cyclical motivators within the Laodicean letter. However, due to constraints of space a brief reference to, and analysis of, a few such uses must suffice at this point.

### 1. Right Wing Lobbyists

Within Seventh-day Adventism the Laodicean pericope and its repentance call continues to be used by leading writers, evangelists and administrators as well as disaffected groups within the denomination. Although some of these apply the passage to end-time Christianity in general it is difficult to have an influence on things outside the denomination and much easier to address the problem of lukewarmness, and make calls to repentance, within the church. Laodicea has therefore become a favourite theme with those on the fundamentalist right wing of the church who seek to correct its 'liberal' tendencies and return it to its original doctrinal purity.

The editorial concerns in the publications of right wing lobby groups demonstrate this most adequately. 'Laodicea', 'lukewarmness' and Rev 3:14-22 have been frequent subjects at religious gatherings and spiritual revival meetings organised by the right wing of the church. "Liberty Library" is one such lobby group within Seventh-day Adventism. In its catalogue it advertises a reprint of Ellen White material entitled "God's Remnant Church" thus:

> Is God still in control of His church despite its Laodicean condition? Has the church become part of Babylon? Is God now calling His faithful ones

> out of its communion, or does He yet have a glorious plan for the church of Laodicea?[109]

Such material is aimed purely within the church. Another revisionist publication, Adventism Triumphant, advertises itself as providing "incisive articles that address Laodicea's condition."[110]

The critical, but crucially non-separatist, magazine Our Firm Foundation has published many articles on this same theme.[111] It uses the Laodicean hermeneutic to berate severely the wayward SDA church from within. But the journal's rhetoric and theology is also shaped and constrained by the passage. An article by the editor of Our Firm Foundation, entitled "The Message to Laodiceans"[112] clearly reflects the rhetorical-critical and *Wirkungsgeschichte* factors relating to Rev 3:14-22 that have been noted thus far. Firstly Laodicea is still applicable and of eschatological importance today:

> What is the message to the Laodicean Church? It is the final pleadings of a merciful Redeemer to a callous and impenitent people. Laodicea is the last church, the last generation living when mankind's probationary time reaches its end.[113]

Secondly the Laodicean letter is a prophecy of contemporary Seventh-day Adventism. The denomination *is* Laodicea. Spear asks, "How does God view the Seventh-day Adventist people, as symbolised by the Laodiceans of Revelation 3:15-17?", and quotes Rev 3:15-17 to answer his question. He then brings in another

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[109]Liberty Library Productions Catalogue, (Anguin, California: Liberty Library Productions, 1996).

[110]Adventism Triumphant 2:2 (1992), rear cover. A similar ethos is evident in material like J Walters (ed.), A Door of Hope for Laodicea (Calimesa, California: SDA Layman's Movement, 1984).

[111]E.g. Vernon Sparks, "Running Ahead of the Lord: Purifying the Church Ahead of Time", Our Firm Foundation (Nov 1993), pp. 16-20.

[112]Ron Spear, "The Message to Laodiceans", Our Firm Foundation (Oct 1994), pp. 20-23.

authority for the SDA-Laodicea connection; "Ellen White enlarges upon this biblical view of how God views Seventh-day Adventists:" and he quotes copiously from Ellen White's own material on the Laodicean hermeneutic.[114]

Thirdly despite being an outspoken critic of the official church administration, Spear uses highly inclusive language throughout his article, demonstrating that the rhetorical dynamic of the pericope impels the reader and exegete in this direction. Thus:

> The inspired testimony tells us that we are deceived about our true standing with God. We believe we are all right when we are all wrong. The message to the Laodicean church is designed to awaken us to our true spiritual condition of carnal security. God sends this straight testimony to the Seventh-day Adventist Church . . .[115]

Fourthly, like Brightman and the Whites, Spear applies details of the text to specific situations. For example the blindness of Rev 3:17 relates to the fact that in mainstream Adventism there has been a decrease in the use of Ellen White's texts (which he refers to as "the Spirit of Prophecy") in preaching and personal devotion and that her material is now interpreted within a cultural context. But still Spear's reproving language is inclusive:

> We have refused to accept the rebukes and warnings given through the Spirit of Prophecy. We have rejected His delegated messenger and treated the messages she delivered with scorn, as if they are idle tales.[116]

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[113]Ibid., p. 20.
[114]Ibid.
[115]Ibid., p. 21. My underlining.
[116]Ibid., p. 21. My underlining.

Finally the double edged concept of Seventh-day Adventism as an 'Elect Nation' in need of divine chastisement is shown:

> Will God reject the Seventh-day Adventist Church because of her miserable spiritual bankruptcy? No, he will not reject the church; He will purify it unto Himself. The shaking will soon reveal a purified people ready for the experience of the latter rain.[117]

Spear's references to purification and the latter rain reveals a belief in a glorious future for the church in fulfilment of the promised blessings and glorification of Rev 3:20-21.

Robert Wieland has been an outspoken critic within Seventh-day Adventism and an advocate of doctrinal change for many years, though with a different doctrinal agenda to Spear. He too focuses heavily on the Laodicean letter utilising its rhetorical power in his attempts to reform the church. Despite believing that the church is woefully misguided his approach is consistent with others who accept the historicist paradigm for Revelation 2-3. His language is inclusive,[118] he derives hope and an 'elect nation' from Rev 3:14-22,[119] and identifies the letter as Christ's direct call for the contemporary Seventh-day Adventist denomination to repent. "There is such a thing as the Seventh-day Adventist conscience. Does that conscience recognize the need that our True Witness says is ours?"[120]

Interestingly Wieland is an advocate of corporate repentance, and uses Rev 3:14-22 to justify this doctrine. Again this results in non-separatism and 'elect-nationism', quite similar to Brightman's. Speaking of the SDA church he states "The individuals

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[117]Ibid., p. 22.

[118]R J Wieland, The Knocking at the Door (Pasadena, California: Pacific Book & Printing, 1983), pp. 40 and passim.

[119]Ibid., p. 108.

[120]Ibid., p. 91.

comprising this body can repent as a body",[121] and of the promised relationship between Christ and his people revealed in the letter to the Laodicean, "this never-before phase of our great High Priest's ministry calls for a never-before response from His people."[122]

A final aspect of Wieland's application of Rev 3:14-22 relates to Seventh-day Adventist clergy and leadership. Like Brightman (see above, pp. 256f) and the Whites (see above, pp. 306f) he utilises the 'angel of the church' element of Rev 3:14 to castigate the spiritual guardians of latter-day Laodicea. However, although they are to be severely reprimanded they too are a part of the end time remnant and if they accept their divinely appointed responsibility they too will inherit all aspects of the blessings Christ has in store for his church.[123]

It is worth noting that nowhere in this body of critical material, representing varying theological positions, are there calls for separation from the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. No sub-groups, either righteous or wicked, are specified in the Laodicean letter, making any separation or elitism exegetically untenable. It is inclusiveness and comprehensive corporate repentance that is called for in the text and these interpreters remain true to that.

## 2. Mainstream Seventh-day Adventists

More mainstream SDA material has also regularly utilised the Laodicean theme. An article by J B McLain in Ministry, the official journal for SDA clergy, is a good example of its usage and influence. Although less apocalyptic and "elect nation" oriented than Spear it still perceives the pericope's power to motivate and follows in the same

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[121]R J Wieland. Bible Repentance (Privately Published. c. 1980). p. 60. (This document is available at the Adventist Heritage Centre. Newbold College. Bracknell. RG42 4AN.)

[122]Ibid.. p. 10.

[123]Ibid.. p. 54f.

path as other historicist interpretations of the letter. McLain holds that the Laodicean letter is a prophetic representation of the whole of end-time Christendom, but especially the SDA church. The church is God's chosen instrument and will triumphantly receive the promised rewards after chastening.

> Laodicea represents today's Christianity generally, and the Seventh-day Adventist church specifically . . . Laodicea does not lack for organisation or goals or plans. We will not fulfil our commission by finding a better method . . . ultimately Laodicea will complete the work of God. The real question is what part you will have in it.[124]

McLain's emphasis is notably more devotional and conciliatory that Spear's, though his language is equally inclusive.

A lengthier treatment of the Laodicean letter is given by E H (Jack) Sequeira.[125] This book is aimed exclusively at SDAs and emphasises Seventh-day Adventism's elect rôle by tying together Rev 3:14-22 and the three angels' messages of Revelation 14 which Seventh-day Adventists see as their *raison d'être*. Sequeira's rhetoric utilises inclusive language and he is careful to keep the tone upbeat. Where he varies significantly from Spear is in what exactly the SDA denomination needs to repent from:

> . . . we need to have a change in direction from our works of the law to the works of faith Jesus describes in (Revelation 3) verse 18. This means to make a U-turn from our own self-righteousness to Christ's righteousness. . . . It's one thing to repent of our sins; it's another thing

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[124]J B McLain, "Laodicea: the Church that Will", Ministry (June 1988), pp. 12-13.

[125]E H (Jack) Sequeira, Laodicea: Christ's Urgent Counsel to a Lukewarm Church in the Last Days (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press, 1995).

altogether to repent of our self-righteousness, because these are things that look good, things that we are proud of doing![126]

### 3. Separatists

One final point on the continuing influence of the letter in Seventh-day Adventist circles is worth noting, though with some caution. It would appear that those groups that actually have separated from mainstream Seventh-day Adventism have either glossed over the seven letters in their treatments of Revelation or have had to alter the historicist paradigm significantly. Needless to say, not too much can be drawn from a *via negativa* argument, or the highly eccentric exegetical methods of such groups.[127]

The best known of these groups is the Branch Davidians, led until the tragic Waco massacre in 1993, by David Koresh. Koresh produced a "commentary" of sorts on Revelation,[128] a book he was obsessed with and in which he saw prophetic fulfilments in his own person and following. Koresh was a former SDA, and regularly criticised the church and recruited almost exclusively from within it. However, his interpretation of Revelation 2-3 is close to Preterism and he does not recognise his movement in terms of Laodicea at all. There is a slight indication that he feels the Philadelphian pericope has some relevance to the Branch Davidians,[129] but this is not spelled out in any detail.

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[126]Ibid., p. 88. My parenthesis.

[127]The Branch Davidian sect has, however, attracted the attention of academics working in the sociology of religion, e.g. O'Leary, pp. 225-228; church history, e.g. P Schäfer and M R Cohen (eds.), Toward the Millennium: Messianic Expectations from the Bible to Waco (Leiden: E J Brill, 1998); and New Testament studies, e.g. K G C Newport, Apocalypse and Millennium: Studies in Biblical Eisegesis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), particularly chapter nine, "Waco Apocalypse: The Book of Revelation in the Branch Davidian Tradition".

[128]David Koresh, Commentary upon the Book of Revelation. This work does not appear to be available in print. However, it can be found on the World Wide Web at, www.magnet.ch/serendipity /waco/ koresh.html, and other Internet locations.

[129]Ibid., part 3, (no pagination).

Koresh's chief academic disciple, Livingstone Fagan (who survived the Waco massacre only to be sentenced to forty years in prison) continues to write in the Branch Davidian tradition. In his commentary on Revelation his interpretation of the letters is entirely preterist. He says Revelation 2-3 "give us, who are living today, some insights into how Christ dealt with his church in the past."[130] Only brief comment is given to the letters and the commentary moves swiftly on to Revelation 4.

Another fairly recent schismatic movement, which followed the pronouncements of the French visionary Jeanine Sautron, made radical adjustment to the Laodicean hermeneutic by splitting it in two. Hence their material always refers in a hostile way to official Seventh-day Adventism as "old Laodicea".[131] Sautron's followers are therefore the "new Laodicea".

## F. Conclusion

From the evidence cited above it has been demonstrated, that Seventh-day Adventists used to read, and continue to read, Rev 3:14-22 in a hyper-dynamic way. A great deal more evidence could be provided along these lines. Seventh-day Adventists are convinced that the message of the letter, its descriptions, threats, promises and call to repent, applies specifically to their denomination, congregations, institutions and selves. The response that they make to that message is primarily a response to its castigation. This can take the form of wholesale individual remorse and repentance as it did in late 1856 and early 1857 after the interpretation of the text was first self-applied. But the influence of the text also had a powerful corporate effect as the "shift in

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[130]Livingstone Fagan, The Price of Faith (Privately Published, c. 1994), p. 28. (This document is available at the Adventist Heritage Centre, Newbold College, Bracknell, RG42 4AN.)

ecclesiological self-understanding from a triumphalistic to an anti-triumphalistic attitude . . . provided a powerful incentive to awaken believers to participate in missionary activity."[132]

It is possible that even at that early stage the motivational and rhetorical power of the passage was partially recognised by those using it to reshape their church. Some time in 1859 Ellen White pointed out that the Laodicean letter was:

> . . . designed to arouse the people of God, to discover to them their backsliding, and lead to zealous repentance, that they might be favored with the presence of Jesus and fitted for the loud cry of the third angel.[133]

Response can also involve castigation of Christendom, especially 'apostate' Protestant denominations who should know better than to pander to the beast (Roman Catholicism.) The most common response, however, is one of deflected castigation. The descriptions, reproofs, repentance call and chastisement of the letter to Laodicea is applied within the denomination. This can include leaders, academics, backsliders or liberals. However, those who actually do separate themselves from the mainstream denomination make notably little use of the pericope.

On a personal and denominational level Adventist response to Rev 3:14-22 has established a dynamic tension. On the one hand they know that biblical time prophecy has appointed them as God's remnant church with a special mission and character, but on the other they know that it has been accurately predicted that they are lukewarm and called to absolute repentance. Because it is never possible to rid oneself, corporately or

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[131]Jeanine Sautron, "Separate from Treason and Apostasy!" (Groan Rounde, Oregon: Dreams and Visions Evangelistic Centre Inc., c. 1993), pp. 3-4.

[132]Damsteegt, p. 245.

[133]Ellen White, Testimonies for the Church, Vol. I, p. 186.

individually, of traces of lukewarmness the rhetorical dynamic of the text continues to persuade and motivate those who believe it is addressed specifically to them. Seventh-day Adventists are the 'Remnant Church' but they are also Laodicea and therefore they can not indulge in straight-forward triumphalism. A more complex interaction with the text is in evidence.

In this respect the legacy of Brightman, the Seer and the Baptist has been preserved. The response to the call to repentance in Rev 3:19 continues to be active and apocalyptic. The Seventh-day Adventist/Puritan reader-response is arguably the most important in the history of the influence of this passage. It also has a direct relationship to the reader-response that was intended by John in the first place and even the response of the first Laodiceans.

# Conclusion

The Message to Laodicea, Rev 3:14-22, is dominated by a prophetic repentance call. In voicing this call John has used all his skill, wit and knowledge to persuade his readers that it is in their best interests to respond. As Aune puts it, "(a) central purpose of the author . . . was to motivate the audience to pursue a life of faithfulness and purity in order to avoid the punishments awaiting those who follow the wrong path."[1] To achieve this he uses Old Testament prophetic form, biblical allusion, his knowledge of the local situation, irony, sarcasm and shock tactics. He draws on the presuppositions he shares with his readers. He balances positive and negative motivation, a 'carrot and stick' strategy of threats and promises. More than this, all of John's repentance calls are further reinforced by the recurrence of many of the threat and promise motifs in the visions and narratives that follow the oracles to the churches as he unfolds the glorious future of those who do repent and the terrible fate of those who do not.

This then is practical rhetoric, operating in the intimate relationship between a church and its prophet with all the peculiarities of its Judaeo-Christian background and the social setting of late first-century Greco-Roman urban life in Asia Minor. Commerce, religion, politics and human nature combine to form a complex and unique rhetorical

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[1]D E Aune, "The Apocalypse of John and the Problem of Genre", Semeia 36 (1986), p. 91.

situation. Yet it is still possible to find aspects of the classical rhetorical methods in the Laodicean pericope.[2]

Thus it conforms to the Aristotelian 'type' known as deliberative rhetoric; that is utterances placed in the public domain that are intended to move the audience to actions which are central to the speaker's concerns, or restrain them from actions opposed to his concerns. It uses all three of Aristotle's 'means'. Thus 'pathos/emotion', is seen in the scorn of Rev 3:17 and the compassion of "if anyone hears my voice and opens the door" (3:20). 'Ethos', the appeal to the character of the speaker, is found in the christological introduction (Rev 3:14). All of the oracles are uttered in Christ's voice. There is even 'logic', of the internally consistent kind, "I rebuke and discipline all those whom I love" (Rev 3:19). Evidence of the five 'parts' of a classical rhetorical speech can also be found. 'Invention' is evident in John's use of Old Testament sources, and local allusion; 'arrangement' is seen in the use of the common structure shared by the letters, and the use of the Disputation Speech form. 'Style' is apparent in the irony of the hot-cold-lukewarm paradox, and the reciprocation between the characteristics listed in Rev 3:17 (poor, blind, naked) and the actions given to solve them in 3:18 (buy gold, use eye ointment, clothe in white).[3] Aids to 'memory' and 'delivery', although not prominent rhetorical features of a work intended to be read, might be evident in the formalised opening and closing of the letters and indeed the local allusions. Overall, Revelation's cycles and septets would also have assisted its memorisation and the dramatic imagery certainly gives the deliverer something to work with.[4] It is perhaps not so surprising to

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[2]For an outline of the terms and methods of classical rhetoric, see above, pp. 70-71.

[3]This is evident to almost any reader but would have been especially ironic for the original Laodiceans due to how it related to the local situation.

[4]There is no indication that it was expected to be memorised but the memorisation and performance of it is quite within the realms of possibility. This was demonstrated most impressively by

find all these elements in John's material for there is always going to be something in common between all passionate efforts to persuade, wherever they originate.

Revelation is a complex, multi-dimensional, functional work of art. No single critical approach is sufficient for unpacking the full range of its meanings or its purposes. It is perhaps inevitable that, akin to Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle, observing Revelation from one perspective, or using one set of critical tools, will obscure or distort other features of the work. This is evident in the over dependence on archaeological connections in work like that of Ramsay or Hemer. Hence discussion of the water at Laodicea, for instance, has tended to focus on the mechanics of its delivery and the reasons for its emetic qualities, rather than on what John hoped to achieve by using the 'lukewarm' motif and how it works within the text and context to deliver the hoped for rhetorical effect and its contribution to the literary and theological strategy underpinning the oracle. This current work is, in part, a contribution to countering that problem. It is hoped that more research on Revelation's influence will be undertaken and that it too will link in to actual examples of the text's persuasive effects.

It is equally the case that a single theological doctrine, or socio-religious focus, cannot adequately cover what John hoped to communicate to his flock. Thus, the repentance of his readers from pagan compromise is certainly not John's only interest. But with repentance playing such a key role in the rhetorical structure of Revelation 2 to 3 and the messages themselves setting the agenda for the entire work, it is not unreasonable to claim that an appraisal of authorial intention would be incomplete without a recognition of John's attempts to persuade readers to repent. His use of the

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a non-stop performance of the entire text of Revelation by a single person. David Rhoads, at the 1998 SBL conference. It took well over two hours.

motif strategy examined in Chapter Two above extends this well beyond the seven oracles to the extent that it is a major agent in the author's rhetorical strategy.

Just as the archaeology and social history of Asia Minor can illuminate the historical background of Revelation, the history of its interpretation and influence can reveal how its reception is still shaped by its rhetorical strategy and authorial intent. As has been shown above, there is much to be learned about the text from the interpretive experience and text-reader relationship of those who did actually respond to the repentance call whilst under the conviction that the text referred exclusively to them.

Ulrich Luz, who has helped pioneer the repatriation of the history of a text's influence makes this bold and poetic point:

> . . . biblical texts have a history of effects, which is the history between them and us. This history of effect . . . cannot be separated from the texts, because it is an expression of the text's own power. It belongs to the texts in the same way that a river flowing away from its source belongs to the source. . . . it can function as a bridge between the biblical texts and us. The history of effects thus makes it clear that the Bible and we are not separated from one another. [5]

Luz and Räisänen[6] would like *Wirkungsgeschichte* to become a critical tool for biblical analysis rather than merely the collecting of biblical allusions found in works of literature and the visual arts. This goal will be advanced if the persuasive techniques of the author and the hoped for responses of his audience are analysed in the light of actual influences of the text.

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[5]Luz, Matthew in History, p. 24.
[6]Luz, Ibid., pp. 24f.; Räisänen, pp.323-324.

It is true that the approach taken to the text of the Laodicean letter by historicists like Thomas Brightman and his followers and the Seventh-day Adventist church is very different to that of the historical-critical method or even most Christian readers today. But it is not so very different to the way the first Laodiceans must have read it, at least in terms of the response to the repentance call. The evidence presented above in Chapter Four and Five shows that when an interpretive community accepts a text as applying specifically to them they relate to the text in a dynamic way, thus becoming vulnerable themselves to its rhetorical strategy. L L Thompson is keen to make the point that "the significance of John's message is (not) limited to its first-century Asian social context. . . . . past situations may disclose new ways of understanding. Two thousand years have not very much changed how humans adapt to their environment."[7] The response made by readers to a strategy of threats and promises might represent one such unchanging aspect of human behaviour.

The stream of influence that this thesis has traced, from the Hebrew prophets, John the Baptist, Jesus, John of Patmos, Thomas Brightman, William Miller, James White and Seventh-day Adventist self-understanding is a winding one for sure. But it bears the hallmarks of its source and demonstrates Luz's claim that, "biblical texts do not have meaning, but rather they produce meaning – new meanings – again and again in history."[8] In the rhetorical dynamics and history of influence of the letter to Laodicea there is undoubtedly a persuasive artistry at work. The call to repentance is effective because of its rhetorical strategy and the narrative hierarchy implied in the text. Because the community is universally condemned, there is little opportunity for elitism or

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[7]L L Thompson, p. 5.
[8]Luz, Matthew in History, p. 17. (His emphasises.)

separatism. Because of the exposure of shortcomings there is no room for spiritual arrogance. Because the Laodicean metaphors have multiple capacities for meaning they provide all readers with the maximum capacity for self-recognition. Because lukewarmness and conceit are universal human traits (and completely relative) the strategy is self-renewing - there is no place for self congratulation. The carrot drives the community forward and the stick keeps it humble. Because it is the last of the letters and because of the intimacy and proximity of Christ (the Laodiceans are metaphorically in his mouth and he is at the door) an apocalyptic urgency is added to the persuasive factors of the text, a text that addresses God's last people.

It is remarkable to discover that a text which is as specifically tied in to a *Sitz im Leben* as the Laodicean letter, can build and maintain such an influential life long after that *Sitz im Leben* has ceased to exist. Does this means that the text is inspired? Perhaps that is too subjective a question to ask here. But it is certainly the work of an artist – for it represents indeed the "Art of Apocalyptic Persuasion."

> . . . we too are part of that river that is nourished by the biblical texts. We, the present readers, are not independent from the history of effect of the Bible.[9]

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[9]Ibid., p. 25.

# Appendix A

## Occurrences of Repent in the Apocalypse

| # | Ref | Greek | Translation of passage |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | 2:5a | *μετανόησον*<br>2 pers. sing. aor. 1, imper | Remember then from what you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. |
| 2. | 2:5b | *μετανοήσῃς*<br>2 pers sing aor. 1, subj | If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. |
| 3. | 2:16 | *μετανόησον*<br>2 pers. sing. aor. 1, imper | Repent then. If not, I will come to you soon and make war against them with the sword of my mouth. |
| 4. | 2:21a | *μετανοήσῃ*<br>3 pers. sing aor. 1, subj | I gave her time to repent, |
| 5. | 2:21b | *μετανοῆσαι*<br>aor. 1, infin | but she refuses to repent of her fornication. |
| 6. | 2:22 | *μετανοήσουσιν*<br>3 pers. pl. fut. ind. | Beware, I am throwing her on a bed, and those who commit adultery with her I am throwing into great distress, unless they repent of her doings. |
| 7. | 3:3 | *μετανόησον*<br>2 pers. sing. aor. 1, imper | Remember then what you received and heard; obey it, and repent. If you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you. |
| 8. | 3:19 | *μετανόησον*<br>2 pers. sing. aor. 1, imper | I rebuke and I discipline all those whom I love. So be zealous and repent! |
| 9. | 9:20 | *μετενόησαν*<br>3 pers. pl. aor. 1, ind | The rest of humankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands or give up worshipping demons and idols of gold and silver |
| 10. | 9:21 | *μετενόησαν*<br>3 pers. pl. aor. 1, ind | And they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their fornication or their thefts. |
| 11. | 16:9 | *Μετενόησαν*<br>3 pers. pl. aor. 1, ind | They were scorched by the fierce heat, but they cursed the name of God, who had authority over these plagues, and they did not repent and give him glory. |
| 12. | 16:11 | *μετενόησαν*<br>3 pers. pl. aor. 1, imper | and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and sores, and they did not repent of their deeds. |

# Appendix B

## The Text of the Laodicean Message – Rev 3:14-22

Comparison of New Revised Standard Version, the Greek text of Nestle-Aland XXVII and my own translation (in italics).

| | |
|---|---|
| **Rev 3:14** | And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the origin of God's creation:<br>Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Λαοδικείᾳ ἐκκλησίας γράψον· Τάδε λέγει ὁ ἀμήν, ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστὸς καὶ ἀληθινός, ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς κτίσεως τοῦ θεοῦ·<br>*And to the angel of the Laodicean church write: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the prime source of God's creation says this:* |
| **Rev 3:15** | "I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either cold or hot.<br>οἶδά σου τὰ ἔργα, ὅτι οὔτε ψυχρὸς εἶ οὔτε ζεστός. ὄφελον ψυχρὸς ἦς ἢ ζεστός.<br>*I know (from) your works, that you are neither hot nor cold. I wish that you were either hot or cold.* |
| **Rev 3:16** | So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth.<br>οὕτως, ὅτι χλιαρὸς εἶ καὶ οὔτε ζεστὸς οὔτε ψυχρός, μέλλω σε ἐμέσαι ἐκ τοῦ στόματός μου.<br>*So since you are lukewarm, neither hot or cold, I am about to vomit you out of my mouth.* |
| **Rev 3:17** | For you say, 'I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing.' You do not realise that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.<br>ὅτι λέγεις ὅτι πλούσιός εἰμι καὶ πεπλούτηκα καὶ οὐδὲν χρείαν ἔχω, καὶ οὐκ οἶδας ὅτι σὺ εἶ ὁ ταλαίπωρος καὶ ἐλεεινὸς καὶ πτωχὸς καὶ τυφλὸς καὶ γυμνός,<br>*Because you declare "I am rich and I have acquired wealth and I have no need of anything." But you do not realise that you are the wretchedest; pitiful, poor, blind and naked.* |
| **Rev 3:18** | Therefore I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire so that you may be rich; and white robes to clothe you and to keep the shame of your nakedness from being seen; and salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see.<br>συμβουλεύω σοι ἀγοράσαι παρ' ἐμοῦ χρυσίον πεπυρωμένον ἐκ πυρὸς ἵνα πλουτήσῃς, καὶ ἱμάτια λευκὰ ἵνα περιβάλῃ καὶ μὴ φανερωθῇ ἡ αἰσχύνη τῆς γυμνότητός σου, καὶ κολλ[ο]ύριον ἐγχρῖσαι τοὺς ὀφθαλμούς σου ἵνα βλέπῃς.<br>*I advise you to buy from me gold - refined by fire - so that you may become rich; white clothes so that you may dress yourself and cover up the shame of your nakedness; and eye ointment, to anoint your eyes so that you may see.* |
| **Rev 3:19** | I reprove and discipline those whom I love. Be earnest, therefore, and repent.<br>ἐγὼ ὅσους ἐὰν φιλῶ ἐλέγχω καὶ παιδεύω· ζήλευε οὖν καὶ μετανόησον.<br>*I rebuke and I discipline all those whom I love. So be zealous and repent.* |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Rev 3:20** | Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me.<br>Ἰδοὺ ἕστηκα ἐπὶ τὴν θύραν καὶ κρούω· ἐάν τις ἀκούσῃ τῆς φωνῆς μου καὶ ἀνοίξῃ τὴν θύραν [καὶ] εἰσελεύσομαι πρὸς αὐτὸν καὶ δειπνήσω μετ' αὐτοῦ καὶ αὐτὸς μετ' ἐμοῦ.<br>*Look! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to be with them and eat with them, and they will eat with me.* |
| **Rev 3:21** | To the one who conquers I will give a place with me on my throne, just as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.<br>Ὁ νικῶν δώσω αὐτῷ καθίσαι μετ' ἐμοῦ ἐν τῷ θρόνῳ μου, ὡς κἀγὼ ἐνίκησα καὶ ἐκάθισα μετὰ τοῦ πατρός μου ἐν τῷ θρόνῳ αὐτοῦ.<br>*To the conqueror I will give a place on my throne with me, just as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.* |
| **Rev 3:22** | Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches."<br>Ὁ ἔχων οὖς ἀκουσάτω τί τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις.<br>*Those having the ability to hear - let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.* |

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